THE SIKH *ẐAFAR-NĀMAH* OF GURU GOBIND SINGH

A Discursive Blade in the Heart of the Mughal Empire

LOUIS E. FENECH

سخن بر گشایم چو تیغ از نیام
پیامی بکردار غرنده میغ

برا برد باید بر او پیام
یکی نامه باید چو برنده تیغ

شاه نامه فردوسی، ۹۸

I will carry a message to him and its words will be as a blade drawn from its scabbard. A letter must be written whose edge is as sharp as a sword's and whose message booms like the thunder cloud.

Shāh-nāmah Ferdausī (6th edition, Tehran: Ansharat Khushah, AP 1382/2003 CE), p. 98.

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To my children Hanno and Agatha
with much affection and thanks

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ਓ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦ

Jayprest Kaur
07/12/04

The Sikh Ẓafar-nāmah *of Guru Gobind Singh*

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Preface

I BEGIN THIS book with an epigram from the Iranian national epic, the *Shāh-nāmah* of Abu'l Qasim Ferdausi, which predates the formation of the Sikh tradition by some 500 years and the life of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Master, by over 600. While this particular text and its paradigmatic hero Rostam—who is here speaking to the Iranian king Kai Kavus after the latter has read a letter sent by the antagonistic shah of Mazendaran—may seem some distance from the Punjab and the Sikhs, it intersects with the Sikh tradition in a very significant way, forming the mythic template of one of the only diplomatic epistles we can tentatively trace to the tenth Sikh Guru, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* (Epistle of Victory); and it is at this junction and through this letter that we will be able to more robustly tease out the Islamicate context of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Sikh tradition.[1] While the Sikh tradition is clearly an Indic construct its Islamicate (rather than Islamic) dimension is often relegated to the margins in scholarly books and in collective and popular Sikh memory.

This is not to suggest that Islam has had an overwhelming influence on the development of Sikhism; a quick read through the principal Sikh scripture(s) is enough to confirm beyond doubt that this is clearly not the case, that the roots of the tradition's many expressions are overwhelmingly Indic and that the mythology to which the Sikh scripture(s) allude(s) almost always has its origins in the Indian subcontinent.[2] But the various Sikhisms one encounters throughout the history and traditions of the people who identify as Sikh makes equally clear that Sikh traditions evolved within the context of the South Asian Islamicate one of whose major contributors was the glorious Mughal empire; and one of the most important cultural texts of the people who dominated this long-lived empire was the *Shāh-nāmah* with which we begin and to which we shall return. One could expect no less from a tradition like Sikhism, which was formed and which thrived in the Punjab frontier, the

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traditional geographical meeting place of both the Islamicate and Indic civilizations since the dawn of Islam. It is within this arena that Sikh historiography will take the Iranian hero Rostam's exclamation, which we have here quite to heart and itself helps to sharpen the already-edged epistle that forms the topic of this book.

Elaborating this Islamicate background was one of the underlying tasks of my earlier book *Darbar of the Sikh Gurus*, in which I examine the Sikh debt to Indo-Timurid courtly culture and the tenth Guru's attempt to transform his court not so much into an earthly paradise as those courts described within the *Shāh-nāmah* and others throughout northern and southern India, but rather to establish the divine court on earth, the court of God in the human world whose members adhered to a much higher ethical standard than all others, thereby distinguishing and differentiating them from courtiers the world over. This was a darbar emphasizing a bearing, comportment, and activities which were consciously aligned with principles we discover within the Sikh scripture such as *simraṇ, dhiān*, and *kīrtan*; *nām, dhān*, and *iśnān* but all of which were flexible enough to accommodate the newly emerging reality with which the tenth Guru and his Sikhs were confronted in the latter part of the seventeenth century, a state of affairs that included rival courts and *birādarīs* throughout the *pahāṛī* (hilly) region of the Punjab in which the Guru took up residence, a set of circumstances made all the more complicated because of the Mughal presence, which haunted the challenging politics and terrain of this region.[3] The dialogic meeting between these principles and their encounter with the contingencies of seventeenth-century Punjab undoubtedly played a major role in the production of late seventeenth-century Sikh courtly culture, which included views of the body; kings and kingship; divinity; courtiership, and discipleship; manliness and femininity; devotion; authority; and so on and, ultimately, of the nascent Sikh Khalsa itself, the development of which continued to crystallize well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (and in some instances continues to this day).

The letter this book will explore and engage, the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, is very much a product of this court and its multicultural and multicivilizational environment in its choice of themes, tropes, language, and content, making far more readily apparent the Sikh tradition's Islamicate context than have recent studies on the other texts to which Sikhs generally allocate the status of scripture.[4] As suggested, the epistle itself was purposefully cast into the same mould as Ferdausi's remarkable epic, a point that is often made in the many studies of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* that have appeared over the last forty years and

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the one upon which we will continually dwell as we inquire into the epistle. It is this Islamicate background (often confused with an Islamic one) that perhaps explains why the *Ẓafar-nāmah*—both the title of, and certain axioms from which are certainly very well known to Sikhs worldwide but whose content generally is not—has been consigned to a space in popular Sikh tradition in which its just due is, put simply, ignored.[5]

This is a harsh assessment to be sure when one considers that for many Sikhs (but not for all) the epistle is understood as *bāṇī*, sacred utterance.[6] One would expect that a sustained Sikh inquiry into the *Ẓafar-nāmah* itself with a particular emphasis upon its Islamicate roots would be a major topic of concern, especially as this text is often appropriated in both popular histories and Sikh *kathā* or "homily narration" as the tenth Guru's eyewitness account of the events surrounding the Khalsa Sikh evacuation of the fort of Anandpur in 1704 or 1705 in which the Guru and a number of his Khalsa Sikhs escaped with their lives, and the ensuing Battle of Chamkaur in which many of these lives were subsequently lost, including those of two of the tenth Guru's own beloved sons (a grand story of bravery and deceit, to be sure, and one which I will narrate fully in chapter 2). But to this point no such inquiry has been forthcoming despite the fact that a number of monographs both in Punjabi and English as well as in Hindi (to all of which we shall refer throughout this book) have appeared focusing upon the text. In almost all cases, these secondary works situate the *Ẓafar-nāmah* within a well-known pattern of Sikh narrative: the theme of upholding righteousness, with one's life if necessary, which has its genesis in the pronouncements of Guru Nanak and becomes manifest both through the martyrdoms of Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadar (as well as subsequent Sikh martyrdoms) and through the tenth Guru's creation of the Khalsa.[7] Such a reading of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is also easily accommodated into recent researches on martyrdom in the Sikh tradition that suggest that such actions are a testament to the Sikh deference to the will of God, a loving acceptance of all the divine ordains rather than a self-conscious attempt at resistance or edification through the example of one's sacrifice, a common subtext of martyrdom narratives within the Abrahamic religious traditions.[8] As Guru Arjan makes clear:

ਜੋ ਤੁਧ ਭਾਵੈ ਸੋ ਭਲਾ ਤੇਰੈ ਭਾਣੈ ਕਾਰਜ ਰਾਸਿ ।[9]

Good is that which pleases You. Through your sweet will [alone] are my affairs completed,

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and, even more famously,

ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕਾ ਭਾਣਾ ਲਾਗਾ ਮੀਠਾ ।[10]

The Lord's will is sweet [to me].

This lack of knowledge regarding the tenth Guru's epistle is nevertheless understandable since the *Ẓafar-nāmah* does not figure in any of the modern Sikh litanies, hymns, and prayers that make up the daily individual Sikh routine, nor those relegated to collective Sikh custom as we find these in the *Sikh Rahit Maryādā*. The only hint to the letter's existence we discover here is found in the section dealing with the performance of *kīrtan* in which the writings of the Gurus are generally prescribed—although of course the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is not singled out and as such its status as *bāṇī* or "sacred utterance" continues to remain rather ambiguous, despite my earlier claim.[11] We also fail to discover a reference to the epistle in the lengthy *Ammrit Kīrtan* that denotes which hymns may be sung during Sikh *kīrtan* and on which days and special occasions.[12] One could imagine that this absence may have something to do with the fact that the language of the epistle is Persian. This would be a mistaken assumption as *Ammrit Kīrtan* includes a number of Persian works attributed to Bhai Nand Lal Goya, a Sikh theologian cum poet in the darbar of Guru Gobind Singh, predominantly sung during the celebrations connected with individual Sikh Gurus.[13] I should note that there are Sikhs who are far more familiar with the *Ẓafar-nāmah* than the vast majority. This august group is comprised of those disciples of the Guru residing in or nearby the villages of Dina and Kangar where the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was believed to have been written. As the fame associated with this letter inevitably reflects well on their respective villages and kin groups, it is definitely in their interest to instantiate the epistle into their very landscape, a fact to which I will attend in later chapters.

Overall, however, knowledge of the epistle's contents is relatively sparse. This generally disappointing state of affairs could perhaps have something to do with the event that occasioned the writing of the epistle. The loss of Anandpur and its tragic consequences, all of with which the Guru's letter is intimately associated, marks a seminal moment in the Sikh past, a traumatic space in the construction of Sikh historiography. We will of course speak in far more detail about the siege of the town and the subsequent expulsion of the Guru and his Sikhs throughout this book, but for now let us simply note that the Khalsa and other Sikhs chose to leave the town on the condition of safe passage, an oath to which both the Mughals and pahari rajas swore

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upon the Qur'an and the cow respectively. Soon after the Sikh departure, the Mughal army led by Wazir Khan fell upon the Khalsa and decimated a large number of them. This has given rise to a painful memory of the loss. To be sure, Anandpur is also tied to a series of joyous memories to which the contemporary poets of the tenth Guru allude (the ideally casteless nature of the society here for example) and which are referenced in the modern-day ritual initiation into the Sikh Khalsa (*ammrit sanskār*, *khaṇḍe kī pāhul*), which prescribes the male Khalsa's bodily, sartorial, and behavioral discipline. But the loss of the city of joy and its unfortunate outcomes precipitated a general Sikh antipathy to those whom Sikh authors ultimately blamed for the event, namely Muslims (almost always noted as "Turks" throughout Sikh texts) and their religious tradition, Islam—a fact that may elicit some surprise since it is apparent that the principal antagonists in this episode were the Hindu rajas of the Punjab hill kingdoms.[14] This Sikh-Mughal enmity did exist prior to the beginning of the eighteenth century, let me be clear, but it was one that for the most part was well muted (a case in point being the fact that even Guru Arjan's execution at the hands of the Mughals is not specifically mentioned in Sikh literature until the early to mid-eighteenth century, almost 150 years after the horrific episode).[15] The final battle of Anandpur and later Chamkaur dramatically heightened this aversion, and although this hostility (in some cases subtle, in others not) may be found in virtually all Sikh writing of the period (which should in no way be confused with the ground reality of enmities and associations shared by Punjabi Sikhs and Muslims alike, both of which often followed interests linked along *birādarī* lines and the contingencies of the moment),[16] it is perhaps most clearly articulated in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *rahit* and *gur-bilās* literature, culminating in the works of Chaupa and Kesar Singh Chhibbar as well as that of Koer Singh, all three of whose attitudes toward Muslims and Islam generally are among the harshest we will ever find in Sikh literature.[17] The *Ẓafar-nāmah* is read through these tinted glasses today, and such a reading, ironically, may preclude an analysis of the very format the letter adopts, tropes it includes, and the intertextual resonance to the great Persian masters that it makes audible. These will be among the topics explored in this book.

Today, therefore, apart from the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s ostensible historical narrative (which accounts for about a third of the text), both the focus on and the focus of the epistle lie principally upon what certain scholars refer to as its "moral emphasis." This not only includes the principle that regards the defense of the righteous by recourse to weapons as a last resort alone, but also the courage to hold true to one's vows and galvanize one's faith in the

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protective embrace of *Akāl Purakh* (God) in the process, values in good accord with those of the Guru Granth Sahib (also known as the Adi Granth), the principal Sikh scripture, and well in keeping with the mandate of the late nineteenth-century Sikh reform movement, the Singh Sabha[18]—a reference to which it is impossible to avoid when dealing with modern, lived Sikhism(s). In this way, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* serves to complement the many Khalsa rahits that gradually evolved during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into the Khalsa Rahit of the twentieth century and, as well, to support one of the central teachings found within the Adi Granth, the Dasam Granth, and within texts not normally coupled with these such as the *Sarab Loh Granth*,[19] that is the supreme power of the remembrance of and the reliance upon the *nām*, the divine self-expression of the Eternal Guru.[20] There is one other characteristic for which the letter is also known, an emphasis upon the sovereignty of the tenth Guru and by extension that of the Sikhs themselves. This perhaps far more than any other reason sustains the life of the text in modern Sikh consciousness.

The letter has over the last fifty years, furthermore, become a controversial one with academics keenly arguing on the question as to whether it was written by Guru Gobind Singh or not. The majority of these scholars, however, work within the exact same framework despite their differences of opinion and as a result fail to apprehend the true worth of the document. Both interpretations situate the *Ẓafar-nāmah* within the type of positivistic and structured historiography of the present, but its true value is as an eighteenth-century testament to the Sikh understanding not just of one episode in the later years of Guru Gobind Singh's life, but a demonstration of its way of constructing Sikh personhood, of *Sikhī*, "Sikhness," or being Sikh,[21] and of its way of simultaneously relaying information about the past, the present, and of course of the future, at least on one level, the Sikh Khalsa's eighteenth and nineteenth-century place in the South Asian Islamicate in the context of their loss of Guru Gobind Singh, and his continuing presence in them and in the Sikh scriptures.[22] This is a position which the epistle continues to hold to this day, relaying information and articulating memories which still hold sway within the contemporary Sikh Panth.[23] In many ways the question as to its authorship is as devilishly problematic as any search for origins.

In the course of this book however we will nevertheless address the issue of authorship, difficulty notwithstanding. This discussion forms the basis of Chapter Four in which is also included a comparison between the *Ẓafar-nāmah* and what I perceive as other, somewhat similar Islamicate genres—similar in the sense that these share certain affinities with the *Ẓafar-nāmah*.

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We will however begin in Chapter One by elaborating the context out of which the *Ẓafar-nāmah* apparently emerged. This inevitably includes another look at Guru Gobind Singh's extraordinary darbar and its situation within the pahari region of what was in the late seventeenth century, Mughal Punjab (Map 1). We will then turn to the *Ẓafar-nāmah* itself in Chapter Two and set it within what we may call its literary context, its situation within the Dasam Granth, and its place amongst other texts with which it is generally associated in early and contemporary Sikh historiography such as the little-known *Fatḥ-nāmah* (Letter of Victory) attributed to the tenth Guru and the *Ḥikāyats* (Stories) that some scholars believe form the epistle's appendix.[24] Where chapter 3 will set the *Ẓafar-nāmah* within the context of the works of the great Persian masters to which it alludes, chapter 5 will focus on the epistle's internal evidence, specifically the robustly sovereign message of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* in respect to its intertextual resonance to Ferdausi specifically. We will afterward turn to the intriguing place the *Ẓafar-nāmah* has been accorded in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sikh historiography and hagiography. The book will conclude with a brief examination of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s place in Sikh popular art, which will also suggest how Sikhs today appropriate and engage the *Ẓafar-nāmah*.

There is one element that I should address at the onset given the new importance conferred upon *kīrtan* and performance in the construction of South Asian Indic religious imaginaries.[25] Although Sikh *kīrtan* has yet to be fully explored in both the diachronic and synchronic construction of Sikh identities,[26] it is quite true that *kīrtan* performed in front of and appreciated by the gathered sangat opens up a space that does allow for the articulation of Sikh memory and the construction of a Sikh collectivity and identity based in part on those collective memories—a Sikh public, if you will, that remembers the past and projects (itself) into the future.[27] This Sikh construct is created within this space, and it is perhaps here in the darbar (literally the royal "court" in this context) in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, which is treated regally and venerated as a living king, that Sikhs are best able to construct a collectivity that at least for these instants manifests the sovereignty believed to be bequeathed the Panth by the tenth Master.[28] Guru Gobind Singh is remembered first and foremost as a kingly figure, and although the *Ẓafar-nāmah* itself rarely figures as the object of Sikh *kīrtan* (the fact that it is in Persian does seems to matter a great deal in its relative absence), it is appropriated for *kathā*—which is also often delivered within the precincts of a gurdwara—and in some cases forms the basis of *ḍhāḍhī* recitals, which at the Golden Temple complex are purposefully sung in front of the Akal

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Takht, the very symbol, indeed the very stuff of Sikh sovereignty.[29] In these instances, its message of sovereignty, both discursive and moral, coupled with the memory of Guru Gobind Singh and his Khalsa, rings clearly to gathered Sikhs whose collective worship, as I have shown elsewhere, is very much reminiscent of attendance in the royal Indo-Timurid court.[30] These ritual spaces in which Sikhs gather to worship and hear the history with which they are already very familiar are chronologically collapsible, allowing Sikhs to dwell on past sovereignty, enjoy present freedoms, and look forward to the future, permitting them to identify their selves, collective and perhaps individual, with the great heroes and martyrs of the Sikh tradition and their current Panth with the sovereign Panth of the now mythified Sikh past, a past which is very much alive thanks in part to constant tellings and retellings that add new vibrant textures. There is of course a teleology here that, as we shall note, inexorably informs readings of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. The Guru's epistle alludes to such memories and symbols, and in so doing itself manifests the common trope of Sikh victory over oppression and is thus nicely tied into the narrative of Anandpur's tragic loss. For in Sikh martyrological imaginings, tragedies like those of Anandpur are highlighted in order to demonstrate the extraordinary obstacles Sikhs can and inevitably do overcome in order to secure both individual and collective Sikh victory.

Once again, I find myself in the enviable position of having to thank the many, many people who have made this book possible. The joy of remembering and noting these friends and institutions is however tempered with a great deal of sadness. While writing this book, I lost a number of very close friends and mentors, the debts to whom I can never adequately repay. July 2009 saw the loss of Hew McLeod, a good friend and excellent teacher for over twenty years. His counsel continues to guide my love for and fascination with Sikh history and the Sikh people, and I can only hope that the many excellent lessons he taught me are here done some justice. Very soon after the death of Hew, the South Asian Studies community worldwide suffered the loss of Jerry Barrier. Although known mainly as the face behind South Asia Books, Jerry was pioneering in his enthusiasm for late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sikh history, an infectious passion we see in his many publications, which could not help but affect those within his orbit. I also remember my very dear Punjabi and Brajbhasha teacher, Professor Prem Singh, late of Delhi University's Department of Linguistics, who taught me the subtleties of the Punjabi grammar he so loved and never had a chance to formally teach. Prem Singh could call someone an idiot in the most beloved way, and this idiot for one misses him terribly. I remember my two friends Professor J. S. Rahi of

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Note on Orthography

This book makes considerable use of Punjabi, Brajbhasha, Persian, and Arabic words. In many cases, the word is italicized when it first appears and then written without italicization in subsequent appearances. There are some exceptions to this rule, most notably Persian literary terms (*bait*, *meṣrā'*) and the titles *Ẓafar-nāmah* and *Sẖāh-nāmah*, which retain italicization and diacritics throughout. The use of nasalization in Indic languages will be here generally indicated with the letter "n" although in rare cases "ṁ." In almost every instance I have retained the original Punjabi/Gurmukhi spellings and transliterations for words rather than their more popular Hindi/Devanagari spellings or Persian spellings. When referring to the Persian *Ẓafar-nāmah* however its Persian transliteration is retained unless it is used in the context of a Punjabi quotation where it will appear as the Punjabi *Zafar-nāmā*. I have also adopted the less bulky transliteration of Arabic and Persian names and phrases in most cases: and so Jallaluddin rather than Jallal-ud-din. The Persian *ezāfah* is generally indicated with an hyphenated "i" (with either "ye" or "ʾi" as the case warrants) as in *Dīvān-i Goyā* while final *he-havvaz* is indicated as *–ah*, so *nāmah* rather than *nāmeh*, *nāma*, or *nāme*, which also applies to *kah* (which usually appears as *ki* in Indo-Persian transliteration or *keh*). Most words are pluralized after the English fashion, by adding the final "s" to the word's ending.

This book also indicates years according to a number of separate calendars. The four dating systems which are used are taken notice of with the following abbreviations: the Indian Vikramaditya calendar is noted as *sammat* or simply S.; the Muslim Hijri calendar is stated as *Anno Hegirae* or AH; the Persian year as *Anno Persico* or AP; and the Gregorian year as the Common Era or CE. Documenting dates by the so-called *Nānak-śāhī* calendar (the Sikh calendar which takes the year of Guru Nanak's birth [1469 CE] as its first) was not at all common until the later twentieth century and so it is absent within this monograph.

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Quotations from both the Adi Granth and the Dasam Granth are taken from the standard 1430-page edition of the Adi Granth and the regular 1428-page edition of the Dasam Granth (unless otherwise noted) both of which appear in a number of formats. See *Ādi Srī Gurū Granth Sāhib jī*, 2 vols. (Amritsar: Bhai Chatar Singh Jivan Singh, n.d.) [hereafter Adi Granth] and *Srī Dasam Gurū Granth Sāhib jī* (Amritsar: Bhai Chatar Singh Jivan Singh, S. 2045/1988 CE) [hereafter Dasam Granth].

Except where noted otherwise, all translations from Punjabi, Brajbhasha/Hindi, and Persian are my own with editorial assistance from Pashaura Singh and Christopher Shackle, both of whom of course have my thanks.

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The Sikh Ẓafar-nāmah *of Guru Gobind Singh*

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I

Diplomacy at the Court of Guru Gobind Singh

ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਤਾਣੁ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਦੀਬਾਣੁ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੋ ਰਖ ਕਰਾਵੈ ।[1]

Hari's Name is their power; Hari's Name is their court;
the Name of Hari protects them.

EARLY IN THE year 2000 in *tahsil* Handiya of district Harda in central India, an early eighteenth-century *sanad* or "contract" prepared in Gurmukhi script was discovered in the possession of one Gokul Bhatt, a Brahman of the region. The said *sanad* had been, it is alleged, the property of the Bhatt family for many generations and was originally written for their distinguished ancestor, the scholar Bongar Bhatt, in what is today Madhya Pradesh. Although there are literally thousands of *sanads* in both Persian, the principal literary and bureaucratic language of the Indo-Timurid court, and the regional vernaculars of India that span the history of the Indo-Timurid Mughal Empire,[2] what makes this particular one significant is that it was said to have been issued by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, as he was travelling southward in late 1706 CE to meet with the Emperor Aurangzeb (1618–1707 CE).[3]

The word *sanad* ("to rely upon") is originally Arabic, one of whose derivatives is the term *isnād* ("alleging on the authority of another") which popularly refers to the chain of narrators who established the legitimacy of a *ḥadīth* or tradition of the Prophet Muhammad.[4] In later seventeenth-century Mughal India, *sanads* formed contractual obligations between the person or agency issuing the document and those to whom it was given. Usually *sanads* granted the people noted within the rights over certain territories or lands and/or the authority for holding a particular office. The contract ultimately made explicit that the resources of the power issuing the *sanad* would back the legitimacy and the rights of the holder. A *sanad* therefore was only as good as the *sanad*-issuer. Initially only recognized Mughal officials could give

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out such documents, but as the nature of Mughal rule changed in the early eighteenth century the system of issuing *sanads* began to fragment.[5] By the later eighteenth century it was not uncommon for even the semi-independent Sikh *sardārs* of the various militias known as *misls* to issue such documents within their respective domains of influence.[6]

Although there is as far as I know no mention of such a *sanad* being issued, of any *sanad* of Guru Gobind Singh in contemporary, and later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sikh sources it was nevertheless declared genuine six years after its detection by the Archaeology Department (of Madhya Pradesh?) for reasons as yet unknown.[7] Since 2006 furthermore reference to the *sanad* has all but disappeared.

For historians of the Sikhs, the *sanad's* uncovering should be startling news, and it raises many of the issues that I touched upon in my recent examination of the *darbārs* or courts of the Sikh Gurus, particularly questions of legitimacy, authority, ritual, etiquette, and power within the larger seventeenth- and eighteenth-century South Asian Islamicate.[8] For the task at hand, however, the *sanad* raises another interesting topic: if genuine, this is among those most scarce of documents, namely the tenth Guru's official diplomatic correspondence, for lack of a better phrase; a document in which the tenth Guru's exercise of authority is patently clear. We may therefore be able to add this *sanad* to the list of very rare objects that now, thanks to Gurinder Singh Mann, includes inscribed copper plates (*tamar patar*) attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, plates that had served as symbols of political patronage by the various pahari chieftains of undivided Punjab and thus a way of accruing a local and spiritual legitimacy over these often tumultuous polities.[9]

By issuing such markers so early in his career as the Guru of the Sikhs (the copper plate of Kapal Mochan for example is dated to 1679 CE, just four years after the young Gobind was made to assume the guruship), the tenth Master, either directly in his own capacity or indirectly through the regency of his maternal uncle Kripal,[10] is characteristically incorporating the sacred landscape of the pahari region (dotted as it is with *śakti pīṭhas*, that is, "seats of the goddess's power") into both the symbolic Sikh universe and his own patrimony, and symbolically binding the temple and its constituencies to his body through the granting of such gifts.[11] The presentation of such manifest symbols of patronage and authority also allowed Guru Gobind Singh to achieve that for which he had most likely hoped through both his many goddess and avatar compositions within the Dasam Granth and his later sponsorship of court poets who wrote predominantly in Brajbhasha (with one very significant exception who wrote in Persian). The choice to

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sponsor and patronize Brajbhasha works and poets from among a number of other classical Hindi dialects available to the tenth Master was in itself a very significant one (as too was the choice of Gurmukhi script rather than the more common Devanagri).[12] By the early to mid-seventeenth century, Brajbhasha was, in the words of Allison Busch, "an aesthetic and political resource" of both Mughal and Rajput court settings, an essential courtly component without which "kings could not be kings."[13]

Put simply, the patronage of important local centers like Naina Devi, Kurukshetra, and Kapal Mochan; the celebration of Hindu festival days such as Diwali and Holi;[14] and the appropriation and adaption of both shastric and classical Indic and Islamicate works as well as domestic and pan-north-Indian "sanskritic" cosmologies and caste society into compositions such as the *Chaṇḍī Charitr Ukti Bilās*, the *Chaṇḍī Charitr*, *Chaubīs Avtār*, *Pakhyān Charitr* 404, and *Bachitar Nāṭak* (among others) was part of a cultural program to at least partially connect the darbar at Anandpur to the Mughal-Rajput courtly elite circles in its vicinity, thus marking the transregional, cosmopolitan, and even classical nature of the Guru's court.[15] In this light, we may point to the second chapter of the *Bachitar Nāṭak* (*The Wonderful Drama*), which traces the tenth Guru's lineage back to Raghu, the founder of the *Raghuvaṁśa* or "lineage of Raghu" into which the divinized Hindu warrior Rama was born, the prince who was the putative ancestor of the many neighboring pahari Rajput houses as well.[16] Such foundational legends allowed the tenth Guru and his Sikhs to assume a common identity with those of the pahari Rajput kingdoms that likely formed a basis for the interaction of the Guru's Anandpuri darbar with that of neighboring courts, allowing both groups to further harness resources. This may also account in part for the slight affinities one detects between the Brajbhasha martial poetry of the Guru's darbar such as the *Bachitar Nāṭak* and Rajput *rāso* ballads, the most popular of which deals with the story of Prithviraj Chauhan by Chand Bardai.[17] This common identity did not, however, preclude resistance to certain facets of Rajput courtly culture, as we shall later note.

All of these efforts on the part of the tenth Guru were also, I believe, part of a political strategy which, on the one hand, reflected the Sikh dependence upon the local Hindu population in that we find here a conscious effort to reach out to local inhabitants to reassure them that while the Sikhs and their Guru articulated a different dharmic or religious and ideological vision (one evident in the Dasam Granth, particularly Guru Gobind Singh's *Jāpu*, *Akāl Ustati*, and *Bachitar Nāṭak*), they were nevertheless sensitive to local traditions, which they would strive to maintain, to the death in one very famous

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instance.[18] Such assurances from Guru Gobind Singh may have been required to ease the anxieties of pahari Hindus toward the apparently large number of Jats and other rumored-troublesome ethnic groups from the Punjab plains (farmers and pastoralists predominantly) who formed the bulk of the Sikh community at this time and who, we may assume, accompanied the tenth Guru to Anandpur and later Paonta in respectable numbers.[19] Such pahari Hindu concerns may have been prompted by the fact that Jats had over the centuries cultivated a strong reputation for attacking other ethnic groups, although competition for resources may have also figured in such an assessment.[20]

It is perhaps for these reasons that Sikhs would later cultivate the story of the tenth Guru's veneration of the goddess and her role in the formation of the Khalsa (a narrative, it bears noting, which we do not find in the Dasam Granth nor in Sainapati's *Gur Sobhā*) that appears sometime in the early to mid-eighteenth century.[21] And they perhaps also account for the prolonged goddess battle narratives we find in the later *Sarab Loh Granth*.[22] Not only was the goddess highly revered in this region as *śakti*, power, both cosmic and mundane, but she was also intimately associated with kingship and the maintenance of dharma, as the patronage of sites associated with her by the numerous rulers throughout the Himalayan region attest.[23] It was likely a recognition of the link between the goddess and sovereignty which led Sukkha Singh in the late eighteenth century to proudly claim that

> ਕਰ ਅਤਿ ਕਸਟ ਕਾਲਕਾ ਪਯਾਵੈ । ਬਿਦਮਾਨ ਦੇਖਨ ਨਹੀਂ ਪਾਵੈ । ਕਲ ਮਹਿ ਦਰਸਨ ਤੋ ਕਹ ਭਯੋ । ਤੋ ਸਮ ਅਵਰ ਨ ਜਗ ਮਹਿ ਜਯੋ ।[24]
>
> A great deal of effort was involved in procuring the presence of the goddess Kalika (Durga); no sight of her manifestation could be obtained. In the current age of degeneracy no other group at the time [apart from the Khalsa] had made [the goddess] appear within the world,

indirectly advocating the sovereignty of the Khalsa through its intimate connection with the goddess (at least in the late eighteenth century). Guru Gobind Singh no doubt saw this connection between the goddess and rule in the late seventeenth-century Rajput pahari kingdoms and made use of it. The closing lines of the *Srī Bhaguatī Astotra* (Verses in praise of the goddess/sword) for example, which is found in certain manuscript copies of the Dasam

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Granth (though not in the formal text itself), establish this connection somewhat more clearly:

ਸਦਾ ਦਾਹਨੇ ਦਾਸ ਦਾਸ ਕੋ ਦਾਨ ਦੀਜੈ। ਗੁਰੂ ਸ਼ਾਹ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਕੀ ਰਖ ਕੀਜੈ।[25]

> Always bestow the gift of good fortune to your most devoted servant: protect the Guru, the king Gobind.

The abundant treatment of goddess imagery in both Sikh symbology and literature as well as the opening *Chaṇḍī dī Vār* inscription on the Kapal Mochan copper plate, would have therefore served Guru Gobind Singh and his Sikhs in this region very well politically, and this may have subsequently led later Sikh and other commentators to assume that such a wealth of images was an indication not just of sovereignty but of pious reverence as well.[26] Robin Rhinehart's careful reading of the Guru's goddess compositions demonstrates, to the contrary, that the emphasis in these is unlike the focus of the Sanskrit *Devī Māhātmyā*, from which the Guru's goddess tales were adapted, in that it is not on the veneration of the goddess per se as within the Sanskrit text but rather on her many bloody and horrific battles[27]—a prominence we also discover in the tenth Guru's apparent appreciation of such works as the *Hanumān Nāṭak*[28]—and their clever rhetorical presentation (a literary dexterity reflecting the cultural capital of the Guru's darbar—or to paraphrase Allison Busch, "the cultural technology of kingship")[29] implying thereby that the actual veneration of the goddess was by no means at the center of the sphere of the dharmic vision of the Guru and his Sikhs. There was nevertheless a sympathetic kinship between the Khalsa of the tenth Guru and the goddess, as Rhinehart insightfully notes in her recent study of the Dasam Granth:

> It is perhaps not surprising that the goddess narratives retain significant rhetorical power in Sikh tradition even when people do not espouse belief in her. The goddess is something of an outsider to the Hindu pantheon; when the gods are in trouble, she is the option of last resort, a fierce fighter, a protector. She stands somewhat apart from the usual social order of the gods but is ready to step in when needed, even if the din of her battle disturbs the gods in their meditative endeavors. This is not unlike the way some Sikhs came to see themselves—fighters and defenders of Indian culture, but not exactly within the Hindu fold.[30]

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While on the other hand the tenth Guru's literature, patronage, and gifting may not only reflect an attempt at the wider incorporation of pahari inhabitants into the tenth Guru's newly evolving order—quite a wide incorporation, of course, in which all people could find a comfortable place—but was also aimed at stabilizing and instantiating what was surely a new and insecure power in the region, the Sikh darbar.[31] Such stabilization would have figured to both local Hindus and to the Sikhs themselves (whether local or transplanted), the latter of who, as Gurinder Mann states on the subject of the tamar patar, "saw the acceptance of the plates by the influential priestly families as a token of their formal submission to Sikh authority."[32] To neighboring Hindu communities, the Guru's grant was most likely understood to be a recognition of the authority of both the temple and the priests of the respective localities surrounding Anandpur. It is likely, therefore, that such activities on the tenth Guru's part were mutually reinforcing, underscoring the symbiotic nature of the relationship between local Sikhs and Hindus.

This stabilization and instantiation noted above was later evinced by the erection of a series of forts protecting what would become the bustling town of Anandpur sometime in or after 1689. Little has been said about the Guru's forts to this point (Gurinder Mann's essay being the exception, although even this focuses solely on the defensive nature of such forts),[33] but it is certainly worth recalling that the Mughals carefully guarded the right to build and manage forts in northern India.[34] And although such rights were granted rarely and in special circumstances, there is no evidence to suggest that these were bestowed upon the tenth Guru, signifying perhaps that the construction of the Anandpur *garḥs* (and the construction of many non-sanctioned forts in northern India, not to mention those in southern India) was, apart from the mere mechanical utility of a fort in protecting one's own territory, both a form of emulation and an act of outright defiance. Such building, moreover, demonstrates the tenth Guru's success in securing local resources and putting them to work whether through what would be later known as *dasvandh* (a one-tenth share of one's income), the collection of taxes, various supplementary contributions, selfless service (*sevā*), or other means.[35] It is likely as well that the tenth Guru took such action as Anandpur was situated in the hilly region of the Punjab and was thus of difficult access to the Mughals, a physical barrier made much more robust by the "political barrier" (in the words of J. S. Grewal) between the imperial territory of the Mughals and the vassal territory of the Rajput kingdoms.[36] It was thanks in part to the difficult terrain that rebellion against the Mughals was a common feature of pahari polities. And in this light one may also add that the construction

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of these forts also displays Guru Gobind Singh's perspicacity, his awareness of the relative hostility of those other pahari rajas surrounding Anandpur to both each other and to himself—a double-edged sword undoubtedly as such fort building could not help but earn the disapproval of ambitious pahari rajas like Bhim Chand of Bilaspur-Kahlur.

It is also significant to note that forts in eighteenth-century northern India were for more than mere defense and protection. As a near-contemporary Maratha Royal Edict noted, "forts... are the essence of the whole kingdom";[37] and these are so because within them were found not only producers of knowledge such as scholars, poets, and various learned litterateurs, but as well doctors (*vaidyas* and *ḥakīms*), collectors of intelligence, and instruments of surveillance.[38] An entire darbar was present within the fort, investing within it cultural and symbolic capital. The erection of such symbols may also have aided in the consolidation of the warrior elites who would ultimately become the Khalsa so lauded in eighteenth-century Sikh literature. These darbars and the physical structures that housed them as well as the *tamar patar* noted above were a testament to the permanence of the Sikh Panth, a clear assertion (architectural and cultural in the former's case) of the tenth Guru's power in the region, perhaps responding to the scandalous allegations against the tenth Guru made by the pahari rajas, which we discover in Sikh traditional histories; and the discovery of such markers of authority and power (with more to likely surface) makes the claim for the authenticity of the *sanad* with which we began this chapter all the stronger.[39]

Although physical evidence of both the Guru's appropriation of this authority and the correspondence that made it manifest is thus exceptional, from the perspective of Sikh tradition this matters little, and so the detection of this *sanad* is not altogether astounding, which perhaps accounts for the fact that so little space has been allocated to its discovery. After all, there are well over two hundred years of Sikh traditions supported in many cases by contemporary oral, literary, and most likely visual evidence which indicate that Guru Gobind Singh was at the apex of a relatively powerful Sikh court (one which was for the most part stable and for the lesser part peripatetic)[40] tied together in part by bonds of mutual love, selfless service (leading to spiritual perfectibility), and learned discourse and as such it was his prerogative to issue such authoritative, contractual documents to those he deemed worthy candidates, particularly within the Anandpur-Makhowal area, which he had inherited from his father and over which he had relative sway.[41] That Harda was some distance from the tenth Guru's patrimony was beside the point as wherever the Guru traveled his authority, spiritual

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or otherwise, remained intact, expressed through the very presence of his person.[42] We may certainly observe this authority in the various written instructions issued by the tenth Guru's father, Guru Tegh Bahadar, who had his Sikhs prepare robes of honor while he traveled throughout eastern India, and as well within those instructions Guru Gobind Singh himself gave out, to which we shall return shortly.[43]

It is to Sikh tradition that we shall turn for the moment, therefore, as eighteenth-century Sikh sources certainly speak of such correspondence in which Guru Gobind Singh's authority was effected regularly, both implicitly and explicitly: the tenth Guru's relations with the pahari rajas, for example, are said to have taken place not only face to face but through such formal communications.[44] The same may be said of the tenth Guru's exchanges with the emperor Aurangzeb[45] initially and afterward with his son and successor Prince Mu'azzam/Bahadar Shah, who we are told befriended the Guru after his entry into the Punjab in 1696.[46]

Hints of these exchanges are, moreover, discovered within the traditional autobiography of the Guru, the *Bachitar Nāṭak* and within the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *rahit-nāmā* and *gur-bilās* literature as well as within other Sikh texts of this period (the genealogy texts for example), most of which draw upon the *Bachitar Nāṭak* in the construction of their narratives.[47] At the beginning of the eighth chapter of this extraordinary drama, for example, Guru Gobind Singh writes of his first few years at Paonta Sahib (also spelled Paunta, lit. "foot-stool"), a small locale within the realm of the Sirmur/Nahan hill kingdom to which he was invited from his patrimony at Anandpur by the new raja of that area, Medni Prakash, in 1685 and where he remained until just after his victory at the Battle of Bhangani (1688) in 1689. Since a move of this nature involved both complicated logistics and a great deal of effort on the parts of the Guru, his uncle, and the Guru's court respectively—exertion most likely matched in part by Medni Prakash himself—it is quite certain that the translation to Paonta Sahib would have served both the Guru's and the Raja of Sirmur's interests equally and symbiotically.[48]

ਰਾਜ ਸਾਜ ਹਮ ਪਰ ਜਬ ਆਯੋ । ਜਥਾ ਸਕਤਿ ਤਬ ਧਰਮੁ ਚਲਾਯੋ । ਭਾਂਤਿ ਭਾਂਤਿ ਬਨਿ ਖੇਲਿ ਸਿਕਾਰਾ । ਮਾਰੇ ਰੀਛ ਰੋਝ ਝੰਖਾਰਾ । ਦੇਸ ਚਾਲ ਹਮ ਤੇ ਪੁਨਿ ਭਈ । ਸਹਰ ਪਾਂਵਟਾ ਕੀ ਸੁਧਿ ਲਈ । ਕਾਲੰਦੀ ਤਟਿ ਕਰੇ ਬਿਲਾਸਾ । ਅਨਿਕ ਭਾਂਤ ਕੇ ਪੇਖ ਤਮਾਸਾ । ਤਹ ਕੇ ਸਿੰਘ ਘਨੇ ਚੁਨਿ ਮਾਰੇ । ਰੋਝ ਰੀਛ ਬਹੁ ਭਾਂਤਿ ਬਿਦਾਰੇ । ਫਤੇਸਾਹ ਕੋਪਾ ਤਬਿ ਰਾਜਾ । ਲੋਹ ਪਰਾ ਹਮ ਸੋ ਬਿਨੁ ਕਾਜਾ ।[49]

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> When rule became my lot I spread dharma to the best of my ability. I hunted many different types of animals within the forest, killing bears, antelopes, and elks. I left my home territory [of Anandpur] and made my way to Paonta (*Pāṅvaṭā*). Here, on the banks of the Kalindri (Yamuna) River I saw various spectacles (*tamāśā*). There too I hunted and killed lions, antelopes, and bears of many varieties. The king [of Garhwal, the area neighboring Sirmur/Nahan], Fateh Shah, was angered and attacked me without provocation.

Surely as the Guru was thrust into this tempestuous arena dominated by fierce local struggles—if initially for no reasons other than that he was the son of Guru Tegh Bahadar and that the territory inherited from his father lay on the borders of Raja Bhim Chand's Bilaspur, the most powerful of the hill kingdoms, the initial attack of which, let us recall, the tenth Guru had already repulsed while in Anandpur-Makhowal, in 1682—as this passage makes explicit and later tradition supplements, it is reasonable to assume that he would have established official or at least cordial relations with his neighbors through regular letters, embassies, gift exchange, contracts, visits, and other forms of contact, particularly since genuine Mughal documents attest to the Guru's representative authority.[30] After all, the tenth Guru's Paonta Sahib (and later Anandpur) and its adjoining hill territories shared the common historical and political environment that was the hill region of the Punjab frontier, and as such this town was related to its neighbors and nearby villages by a network of religious, symbolic, mythic, kinship, commercial, martial, political, and ideological ties fostering relationships that were at times amicable and at others less so, but ones that were always intricate and complex, requiring a great deal of negotiation—and when compromise and concession were no longer options, armed force and perhaps even pillage.[31] Indeed, from the *Bachitar Nāṭak* itself we infer these close relations and their discontents, what Freud referred to as the "narcissism of minor differences,"[32] that sometimes the Guru fought against certain pahari rulers and at others fought alongside them in ways that perhaps prefigure the complex relationships between the Sikh sardars of later years.[33] Even the intrigues within the various goddess compositions attributed to Guru Gobind Singh may be read as analogous of the delicate negotiations between the tenth Master and his pahari neighbors, as Robin Rhinehart has recently conjectured.[34] As the inheritor of the renown of the past Sikh Gurus, furthermore, a bequest especially enhanced after the execution of his father in 1675, it is likely to assume a steady pilgrim traffic between the

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various towns and villages in which the tenth Guru temporarily resided and those of their respective neighbors.[55]

That the Guru himself seemed very well aware of what was required from his apparently new role as ruler and all that such *rāj* entailed is certainly suggested by the *Bachitar Nāṭak* passage above and throughout the majority of compositions within the Dasam Granth.[56] The Dasam Granth, alongside the numerous courtly texts of the Guru's darbar, suggests that Guru Gobind Singh was like his near-contemporary Jaswant Singh of Marwar, "a particularly good example of the deep investment of Indian royalty in aesthetic pursuits."[57] Let us be clear though that the *Bachitar Nāṭak's* account is no simple copy of the understanding of *rāj* we perceive in numerous contemporary and earlier Hindi and Brajbhasha poems on rule, in which the king's duty is outlined as one of "conquest and the provision of booty and fiefs for his men."[58] The tenth Guru's *rāj* embraced a notion of dharma (a specific style of Khalsa dharma according to Jeevan Deol)[59] that was certainly indebted to earlier Indic notions of the phenomenon but struck out in new and fresh directions.[60] In the eighteenth-century *Sikhān dī Bhagatmālā* attributed to Bhai Mani Singh (the text is also known as the *Bhagat Ratnāvalī*), which is apparently an extension of the eleventh *vār* of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla, Bhai Nand Lal Goya describes this subjective construction by contrasting it with the *varnāśramadharma* of the Brahman imaginary (as the author of the text understood it).[61] This is a later text, but it aligns nicely with certain (but not all) claims we discover within the Dasam Granth and thus suggests that the dharma of the Guru incorporated both wider political and cosmological claims (as suggested by Jeevan Deol) and as such precipitated a different style of dominion, a situation attested by the simple fact that the Guru had little interest in the expansion of his domain and the seizure of territory,[62] and the distribution of booty to his lieutenants, points that one perceives throughout Sikh literature.[63] Such dharmic concerns on the tenth Guru's part, anxieties we easily detect throughout the Dasam Granth, demonstrate much like the *gur-bilās* literature that worldly power was corrupting and as such these concerns are perhaps an extension of the *halemī rāj* or "rule of the humble" of which Guru Arjan speaks within the Adi Granth, a style of rule that the earlier Sikh Gurus most likely embodied and followed.[64]

But even the rule of the meek and those dedicated to the cause of the True Guru required modest rulers to be diplomatically astute and thoroughly grounded in traditional statecraft. That the Guru was just so instructed seems clear from the works produced in his court, including Brajbhasha texts on

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rāj-nītī,[65] the many adaptations of the Mahabharata, and the Brajbhasha interpretations of Kautilya's *Arthāśāstra*, as well as the various works within the Dasam Granth such as the *Giān Prabodh* and *Pakhyān Charitr*. And in regard to such statecraft, a different chapter of the *Bachitar Nāṭak* further suggests that Guru Gobind Singh was well aware of the importance of gathering intelligence on his surrounding rulers and opponents and had to this end put into place an effective system of surveillance to match that of the pahari rajas alongside what we may assume were more informal networks of information.[66] Sikh tradition too allows us to infer that the tenth Guru was keen on familiarizing himself more intimately with the greater Mughal Empire, apparently sending Sikhs as far away as Benares for such purposes,[67] and it is perhaps for just this reason that Mughal scribes and poets of the caliber of Bhai Nand Lal Goya and Kavi Alam were attracted to his court: that its nature was very much a cosmopolitan rather than parochial one. It is hard to imagine the tenth Guru not availing himself of the intimate knowledge of the Mughal court which such ex-servants of the royal darbar would have possessed. It is in regard to intelligence gathering that we may also point to the significance of hunting.

Hunting for example did not, as Grewal and Bal rightly suggest, indicate that the Guru's days were at this juncture less worrisome than those of his later years.[68] Although they fail to elaborate upon the significance of hunting within the Guru's political sphere, it is clear that the activity was more than just a sport or leisurely endeavor—and that, moreover, it had lost in large part its earlier Indian association with addiction and vice, a connection we see as early as the seventh book of the Rig Veda[69]—as it allowed the king, in this case the tenth Guru, to demonstrate his own physical and tactical prowess, to familiarize himself with the lay of the land, and to gather intelligence through networks of his own equivalent of the famous *harkāre*; it also provided an arena in which local residents and villagers could perhaps engage the Guru and intimately supplement local and regional knowledge he had gathered, and as well it offered a forum of display for his Sikhs and others who wished to catch the Guru's attention with their skill or service, and so on.[70] It is no surprise that in later Sikh iconography the tenth Guru is often displayed with a hawk, the hunting bird par excellence, and in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century paintings of the Kangra style with hunting dogs.[71] Hunting aside, this passage interlinks the Islamicate etiquette required of the king and the qualities of kingship about which we hear in the Hindu shastras, the Puranas, and the epics, namely that the king's primary duty is to both protect the world and

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in the process maintain dharma and justice, a practice not unlike that of the classical avatar who restores justice.[72]

The very fact of his invitation to Paonta by Medni Prakash, moreover, is a testament to his power in the region, a strength which appears to have been augmented in the eyes of his contemporary rulers by the number of both rural mercenaries who had attached themselves to the Guru and other disaffected soldiers who may have otherwise turned to plunder, as well as perhaps the armed ascetics who would later be the cause of much consternation to the British throughout northern India,[73] making his Sikhs a force with which to be reckoned.[74] It is unlikely that without such an efficient communication network the Paonta-based Guru would have been able to successfully broker the peace between the adjoining and previously hostile principalities of Nahan and Garhwal.[75] The same channels were also most likely in place and utilized after the Guru had shifted his locale to Anandpur in 1689 following the Battle of Bhangani (1688).[76] It was perhaps the Guru's expanding popular support coupled with his diplomatic fluency and efficiency and the power these developments suggested that caused the emperor Aurangzeb to issue orders to local officials to prevent Sikhs and others from gathering at Anandpur in large numbers as early as 1693.[77] Sikh traditions themselves tell us clearly of these increasing numbers as early as the first decade of the eighteenth century.[78] Ultimately, this led to Sikhs from Anandpur raiding neighboring villages for supplies, which in turn dramatically enhanced the frustrations of the local pahari rajas, who were ultimately led to bury their differences, mount attacks against the Guru's patrimony, and lay collective siege to Anandpur and the tenth Guru and his Khalsa, which forced the tisar panth (or "third tradition") to abandon the town and its forts. This we gather, in part, from Chandra Sain Sainapati's claim in his *Srī Gur Sobhā* (which was completed very soon after the tenth Guru's death),

ਕਰੈ ਬਿਲੰਮ ਭੇਟ ਨਹੀ ਦੇਈ । ਤਾ ਕੋ ਲੂਟ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਲੇਈ । ਇਹਿ ਬਿਧਿ ਚਰਚਾ ਭਈ ਅਪਾਰਾ । ਤਬ ਰਾਜਨ ਮਨ ਮਾਹਿ ਬਿਚਾਰਾ । ਹਮਰੋ ਰਾਜ ਅਕਾਰਥ ਗਯੋ । ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਰਾਜ ਚਹੂ ਦਿਸ ਭਯੋ ।[79]

[The inhabitants of those villages and towns which] delayed or did not offer anything [to the Sikhs] were plundered by the Khalsa. For this reason news [of the Khalsa] spread endlessly and the hill rajas became very wretched as a result. "We have ruled uselessly," they claimed, "for the True Guru's reign is recognized everywhere (i.e., throughout the four cardinal directions)."

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But if there was any diplomatic correspondence between the Guru and his neighbors, it has yet to come to light. What of the Guru's written communication that does exist, reports that we can effortlessly trace back to the actual Guru himself, is of a sort not generally understood as diplomatic, namely the numerous written instructions or *hukam-nāmās* that were sent to various Sikh sangats scattered across northern India.[80]

Today's extant *hukam-nāmās* are usually single folios containing generally concise directives prepared by the Guru himself or written under his auspices, as so noted by the scribes preparing the documents on the tenth Master's behalf. These were a part of Sikh communication networks since at least the time of the tenth Guru's grandfather, Guru Hargobind, and continue in a qualified respect to this very day[81] perhaps unconsciously structured along the same lines as the Mughal *ḥukm-nāmah*.[82] The reverence associated with the reception of these documents in Sikh tradition well accords with the deferential display deemed necessary on receipt of such imperial documents of an instructive nature, including both the Mughal *ḥukm-nāmah* and particularly the *farmān* (royal order), which was often placed upon the head as a sign of respect.[83] To this day, extant *hukam-nāmās* written in the hands of the Gurus are accorded a reverence by Sikhs that is second only to that shown toward the Guru Granth Sahib.[84] These instructions and the apparent deference shown upon their delivery in Sikh tradition certainly demonstrate the Guru's authority and power as well as briefly allude explicitly and implicitly to those beliefs and practices that during that period made one Sikh, to *Sikhī* or "Sikhness" in other words.[85] Not only do we hear requests for Sikhs to come into the Guru's presence armed, to send courtly accoutrements and to guarantee the secure passage of cannons from Kabul to Anandpur in one instance;[86] we also hear appeals for money and for goods, some to allow the Guru and his entourage to travel; we become privy as well to the blessings the Guru showers upon his Sikhs and to the type of political and symbolic economy that surrounds the Guru and his followers. On uncommon occasions, moreover, *hukam-nāmās* may even tell us of the Guru's meetings with well-known historical figures such as the emperor Bahadar Shah.[87]

Within these as well we occasionally note that certain disciples of the Guru are named and referenced in a particular order, which may suggest some kind of hierarchy or precedence, a fact that doubtlessly established the individual authority of particular members of the respective sangats to which the *hukam-nāmās* were directed, prominent members from whom the information within the *hukam-nāmā* would flow.[88] A careful ethnohistorical study of the *hukam-nāmās* of Guru Gobind Singh has yet to be made;

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however, an analysis which also includes those *hukam-nāmās* we do not find in Ganda Singh's impressive collection, of which it seems there are many,[89] as the two recently brought to light by Gurinder Singh Mann demonstrate.[90]

Nevertheless, although these *hukam-nāmās* are very significant in terms of documents demonstrating both the Guru's and the sangat's exercise of power, these are nothing like the official diplomatic correspondence I have in mind: *hukam-nāmās* to be sure were addressed to pious Sikh sangats in a pithy Punjabi rather than to Mughal administrators, officials, or subimperial officers (or their pahari counterparts), and were meant only to instruct those who had an emotional stake in the Guru's continued survival and well-being, the disciples of Guru Gobind Singh in other words. One could thus be led to question, in the light of the extreme paucity of this material, whether the tenth Sikh Master did engage in any diplomatic correspondence at all.

This question, fortunately, may be easily put to rest as the Mughals were very meticulous and efficient record keepers with an extraordinary staff of clerks, intelligence officers, and news-writers.[91] In the *ḥasbulḥukm* (Arabic: "as commanded") dictated by the emperor Aurangzeb to the secretary ʿInayatullah Khan (d. 1725 CE) and collected within the latter's *Aḥkam-i ʿAlamgīrī* (*Aurangzeb's Orders*) there are two references to the single petition received from the tenth Guru. The first is partially reproduced below:

درین آوان فیروزی اقتران حکم جهان مطاع نافذ گشت که بآن وزارت پناه
قلمی گردد گویند رئیس نانك پرستان عرض داشت متفمن اراده آستان
بوس وا لا والتماس صدور منشور فیض ظهور مصحوب وکیل بدرگاه
آسمان جاه ارسال داشته بود[92]

In these times of great victory the world-ruling order has been issued that a note be dispatched to his ministerial highness to the effect that Gobind, the ra'īs of the *Nanak-parastān*, has sent a petition (*ʿarż dāsht*) along with a representative (*vakīl*) to this sky-glorious court, expressing a desire to kiss the imperial threshold (*āstān būs*) and make a plea for the issuance of an order in his favor.

Unfortunately, although Mughal scribes were generally in the habit of reproducing such petitions precisely within various Mughal chronicles (though not regularly within *ḥasbulḥukam*), in this case they did not, and so we simply cannot know what the Guru's *ʿarż dāsht* (if it was the petitioning *ʿarż*

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dāsht) actually contained.[93] All we may readily assume with some certainty is that as a diplomatic letter to the Mughal court and addressed (we assume) to the emperor Aurangzeb, its language would not have been an Indian vernacular. Rather, it would have been Persian—Persian in the hope that it was through this elite, Islamicate language that the letter's impact would be the most powerfully felt and thus its request most quickly met or disregarded. For many scholars of the Sikh tradition, therefore, the reference to the Guru's *'arż dāsht* is to none other than the famous *Ẓafar-nāmah* or "Epistle of Victory" attributed to Guru Gobind Singh.

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2

Ẓafar-Nāmah, Fatḥ-Nāmah, Ḥikāyats, *and the Dasam Granth*

ਜਫਰਨਾਮ ਤਾ ਕੋ ਧਰ ਨਾਮਾ । ਪਠੈ ਦਯੋ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਅਭਿਰਾਮਾ । ਕਈ ਹਿਕਾਇਤ ਤਿਹ ਲਿਖ ਡਾਰੀ । ਗਜਲ ਰੁਬਾਈ ਫਰਦ ਹਜਾਰੀ ।[1]

[The epistle] was titled the *Zafar-nāma* and it was written by the Guru who grants delight. Several stories (*hikāit*) were written and dispatched. On a large number of folios there were ghazals and quatrains.

WRITTEN IN PERSIAN, the diplomatic language of the Mughal court and the eastern Islamicate, particularly as a consequence of the traumatic forced evacuation of the town of Anandpur,[2] which led to the subsequent Battle of Chamkaur in December 1704 or December 1705 CE,[3] the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was, according to tradition, sent to Emperor Aurangzeb by Guru Gobind Singh as a rebuke for the emperor's failure to ensure both his own honorable conduct during the joint Mughal-pahari siege of Anandpur and immediately afterward, and that of his representatives.[4] The letter though does more than admonish. It also offers the emperor an opportunity to redeem his adverse actions by meeting with the Guru to, we may conjecture only, discuss the Sikh recovery of Anandpur.

For reasons already mentioned, the hill rajas of the Punjab became wary of the Guru and his Sikhs almost as soon as the latter had shifted from Paonta to Anandpur in 1689. It appears that during the protracted siege of Anandpur, which began in May 1704 or 1705, the representatives of the emperor and perhaps Aurangzeb himself had guaranteed the Guru's and his Khalsa's safe passage from the city were they to abandon the town's fort of Anandgarh, a promise that was, we are told, written on a copy of the Qur'an itself (as was

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standard practice in such matters since such a vessel sanctified one's oath).[5] The Guru was, tradition continues, well aware of the duplicitous nature of both the pahari rulers and the Mughal authorities (he was perhaps conscious of the fact that past Mughal emperors, Aurangzeb included, had renounced earlier oaths on certain occasions),[6] but he was nevertheless persuaded to accept this condition against his better judgment through the force brought to bear upon him by both his mother and his Sikhs according to later Sikh tradition. As Ratan Singh Bhangu, whose early nineteenth-century *Srī Gurpanth Prakāś* may be deemed illustrative of such subsequent tradition, states:

ਕਹਾ ਕਰੈਂ ਗੁਰ ਮੰਨੈ ਨ ਵਾਇ। ਚਾਰ ਓਰ ਲੋਕ ਨੱਠਣ ਜਾਇ।[7]

What could the Guru do when they refused to accept his advice? [What could the Guru do when] the people [of Anandpur] ran to all four directions [seeking safety]?

The Guru along with his family and his Sikhs thus left the town behind in early December and were almost immediately set upon by Mughal and pahari forces, as the Guru had inevitably foreseen. This separated the tenth Guru from his family (a spot at which today stands Gurdwara *Parivār Vicchoṛā*, lit., "family separation")[8] and precipitated the many consequences noted above, and perhaps most significantly, resulted in the deaths of the Guru's four sons, the execution of the two youngest of whom is still commented upon and commemorated by Sikhs the world over, though with a singular poignancy at Fatehgarh Sahib near the town of Sirhind where the young boys were bricked up alive (in collective Sikh memory) or beheaded (in the earliest accounts). For the author of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, the emperor's inability to monitor his officials meant that their crimes, particularly their violation of oaths sworn upon the Qur'an, "fell upon his head."[9]

According to Sikh tradition today, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was entrusted into the very capable hands of both Bhais Daya and Dharam Singh and dispatched to the emperor.[10] Once in the hands of Aurangzeb, tradition continues, the epistle had very successfully achieved its desired effect, to coordinate a meeting between the Guru and Aurangzeb and to ensure that Aurangzeb regretted his previous action. Upon reading it and becoming privy to the malignant activities of his administrators who acted on his behalf, the emperor felt a deep remorse (a sickness in later Sikh historiography)[11] and immediately dispatched a written order (a *farmān* in this case, Mughal records tell us) and two mace-bearers along with the Guru's courier(s) to summon the tenth Sikh Guru into

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his presence to perhaps deal with the matter of Anandpur and the issue of the emperor's representatives.[12] And although we have what appears to here be a scenario often encountered in Indian hagiography, Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim alike—namely the Bhagat's, Sant's, Sufi's, or Guru's victory over the powerful worldly lord[13]—the semi-deferential tone one detects in an order issued to the *faujdār* of Sirhind (who at the time was the infamous Wazir Khan, the figure ultimately responsible for the execution of the Guru's younger sons) and sent out by 'Inayatullah Khan sometime between 1705–06 CE adds weight to such traditions.

In this particular order, Wazir Khan is informed of the two representatives accompanying the Guru's envoy (in this case the macebearer [*gurzbardār*] Muhammad Beg and the *manṣabdār* Shaikh Yar Muhammad)[14] and of an earlier command sent to Mun'im Khan the deputy governor of Lahore to summon the tenth Master and ensure that a "trustworthy (*mu'tamid*) person" convey him to the royal court safely—the actual *ḥasbulḥukm* to Mun'im Khan to which 'Inayatullah Khan is here referring notes that this person should display *mu'tamidī bā saluk o hoshiyār bāshad*, "a trustworthiness [augmented] with [both] discretion and caution."[15] The *faujdār* Wazir Khan is then told to provide both an escort (*bedaraqah*) for the Guru as well as travelling expenses (*kharch*)—albeit "from all of his [the Guru's] goods (*az jumlah amvāl-ash*)" previously seized by Mughal authorities at Anandpur—and to reassure Guru Gobind Singh (*mustamāl sāzand*) of the emperor's honorable intentions in the light of any possible concern.[16] But before the Guru and Aurangzeb could meet the emperor died, ultimately expiring a broken man Sikh tradition maintains.[17] Continuing on his journey despite this news, the Guru met in Delhi with the emperor's son and potential successor, Prince Mu'azzam/Bahadar Shah, and accompanying his camp to southern India over the next few months[18] the tenth Guru had apparently come to an agreement with the Mughal administration as to the recovery of Anandpur as two of the Guru's *hukam-nāmās* sent from Agra seem to indicate.[19] Unfortunately, the tenth Guru was to never see Anandpur again as shortly thereafter he died from a wound he had earlier sustained.

Let me add as a lengthy caveat that there do exist certain Sikh traditions that note that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was the second of two letters sent to the emperor. According to these, the tenth Guru sent his first letter, the so-called *Fatḥ-nāmah* (also "Letter of Victory" or "Proclamation of Victory" as per the Mughals)[20] from Lamman-Jattpura very soon after Anandpur's evacuation and the ensuing Battle of Chamkaur, and dispatched the *Ẓafar-nāmah* only after he had received a reply to this first letter.[21] These are not only later traditions

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(early to mid-twentieth century)[22] but the *Fatḥ-nāmah*, very tacit allusions to which, some scholars claim, may possibly be fathomed from *Ẓafar-nāmah* 54, 56, and 61 (in the latter of which the Guru reminds Aurangzeb of a pledge he had earlier given about inducting the tenth Master into the Mughal court),[23] differs markedly from the *Ẓafar-nāmah* not so much in content as it too seems to narrate events regarding the Battle of Chamkaur and also follows the meter, language, and style of the *Shāh-nāmah* (for which more see later), but very much so in spirit in that it is neither subtle nor poignant, containing couplets that, in my humble opinion, make these appear to not be the work of Guru Gobind Singh[24]—even a Guru Gobind Singh initially distraught at the circumstance in which he found himself after the evacuation of Anandpur and the deaths of his sons and mother, as some traditions maintain—especially the final few *bait*s, which are mercilessly taunting and bitter in nature.[25] A particularly distressing couplet appears as *Fatḥ-nāmah* 16:

نه دیگر گرایم بنام خدات که دیدم خدا و کلام خدات[26]

> I can no longer trust [an oath taken] in the name of your god (*be-nām-i khudāt*): I have both seen [your] god and [heard] your god's word (*kalām*: also a reference to scholastic Islamic theology).

As one purpose of the common Mughal *fatḥ-nāmah* was "to strike terror in the hearts of recalcitrant chiefs maturing aggressive plans,"[27] it is no surprise that these letters were generally sent to many places by a sovereign to broadcast his victory over an enemy and could thus be read out in public, making quite blatant one's own royal prowess.[28] In this regard, the *Fatḥ-nāmah* attributed to the Guru certainly follows earlier precedent in that it too strikes a resoundingly aggressive note of militancy.[29] Such claims notwithstanding, the harsh tone in the rendering of *khudāt*, "your god" in *bait* 16 sounds nothing like the tenth Guru who authored the *Akāl Ustati* (Praise of the Timeless Lord), which makes clear throughout that the one god of the Muslims is also the god of Hindus and Sikhs and so on thus striking an inclusive and plural tone. A representative example appears in the Guru's *Akāl Ustati* 85 drawing upon both Arabic and Sanskrit terms for the divine:

ਹਿੰਦੂ ਤੁਰਕ ਕੋਊ ਰਾਫਿਜੀ ਇਮਾਮਸਾਫੀ । ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤਿ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੈ ਪਹਚਾਨਬੋ । ਕਰਤਾ ਕਰੀਮ ਸੋਈ ਰਾਜਿਕ ਰਹੀਮ ਓਹੀ । ਦੂਸਰੋ ਨਾ ਭੇਦ ਕੋਈ ਭੂਲਿ ਭ੍ਰਮ ਮਾਨਬੋ । ਏਕ ਹੀ ਕੀ ਸੇਵ ਸਭ ਹੀ ਕੋ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਏਕ । ਏਕ ਹੀ ਸਰੂਪ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੈ ਜੋਤਿ ਜਾਨਬੋ ।[30]

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> Some call themselves Hindu, others identify as Turk while others still refer to themselves as Rafizis (Shi'a Muslims) and Imamshafis (followers of Sha'fi Islam). Recognise that all humanity is just one and that theirs is the very same Lord who is both *kartā* (Skt: creator) and *karīm* (Ar: compassionate); both *rājik* (Ar: provider) and *rahīm* (Ar: merciful). There is no other and so accept any distinguishing signs as error and delusion. Our only duty is to serve the One who is the Master of all. Know that all humanity is the manifestation of his form and his one light.

Clearly, *bait* 16 stands in clear violation of this principle in the former's proclamation that the god of Aurangzeb is not the god of the tenth Guru, a claim that simply cannot be sustained and in no way accurately paints the moral landscape of the Guru's court. Surprisingly, this is the case even within the context of the extant *Fatḥ-nāmah* itself. Indeed, *bait* 16 appears to contradict the earlier couplet we find as *Fatḥ-nāmah* 3, in which we are told that the Lord who gave Aurangzeb sovereignty is the same one who likewise secured the tenth Guru's escape from Anandpur:

همان کو ترا بادشاهی بداد بما دولت دین پناهی بداد[31]

> The one and the same [Lord] (*hamān*) who granted you sovereignty (*bādsh̲āhī*) has given refuge/rule to me as the victory of [my] trust (*daulat-i dīn*).

It is perhaps such *baits* that had prompted some copyists and later authors to incorporate the *baits* of the *Fatḥ-nāmah* into the *Ẓafar-nāmah* proper, which based on the discrepancies between the two works noted above, is a questionable tactic to say the least.[32]

This then is a problematic letter and an equally problematic attribution. This is most likely just as well since the text (comprised originally of over 100 couplets, we are told, though with only 24 minus a hemistich available today) was not only discovered in the late nineteenth century and then recited by memory as the text of the original was lost, but it appears that the very title *Fatḥ-nāmah* was bestowed upon it by Kapur Singh in the 1940s as he was translating the letter into Urdu in his Lahore weekly, *Ajīt*.[33] This accounts for the fact that while Ganda Singh mentions the letter's title as the *Fatḥ-nāmah* in his brief introduction to it, as he recounts the letter's history his title for the work is given simply as *Nāmah-'i Gurū Gobind Singh*.[34] No doubt Kapur

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Singh was well aware of the existence and the contents of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* and chose a historic title such as *Fatḥ-nāmah* close enough to that of the tenth Guru's other epistle to differentiate this letter from the *Ẓafar-nāmah*.[35] I can only conclude, based on this and on internal evidence more particularly, that if the *Fatḥ-nāmah* is not a draft or first attempt ultimately and understandably disregarded by the tenth Guru it can only be a highly questionable text.

Let us now return to the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. Although to the best of my knowledge a letter that is purported to be the original Persian text is not extant there are, we are told, several early copies that have survived which only slightly differ from one another.[36] Many of these are likely to have been consulted in producing the numerous handwritten manuscript copies of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* scattered throughout archives in northern India, almost all in Gurmukhi script and in the Persian language although occasionally in Punjabi translation.[37] Very rare are those *Ẓafar-nāmah* manuscripts in Perso-Arabic *nastaʿlīq* script or the more "shorthand" *shikastah* characters.[38]

The abundance of these manuscripts in Gurmukhi script suggests that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was once a far more regular topic of *kathā* and *kīrtan* than it is today—although one does come across the very rare contemporary *rāgī darbār* in which particular couplets from the *Ẓafar-nāmah* are sung. In this light, therefore, there is certainly a performative dimension to the text, a claim that is supported by the existence of manuscripts that interpret the original Persian text through Punjabi and/or Brajbhasha. And although one cannot exaggerate its importance, both *kīrtan* and *kathā* of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* have most likely kept alive (and fluid) the memory of Anandpur and its evacuation as well as many of the other interrelated themes that permeate the epistle.[39]

The *Ẓafar-nāmah* also appears as part of the compendium that brings together the works attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, the Dasam Granth. As such the standard version of the letter is today found appended to the end of the Book of the Tenth Lord and thus forms a revered part of the sacred Sikh inheritance, at least to most Sikhs. There is some controversy regarding the epistle's authorship, but for most of these Sikhs it is of course beyond doubt that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was composed by the Guru himself as the Gurmukhi text of the standard recension, as well as some *nastaʿlīq* manuscript copies, begins with the phrase *Srī mukh vāk pātśāhī 10*, "Uttered for the blessed mouth of the tenth lord."[40] And although not as frequently referenced today as other compositions attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, its most famous *bait*, twenty-two, to which we shall return in a moment, has nevertheless loomed large within the collective Sikh imagination, sustaining in particular Sikh claims to *dharam yudh*, struggle to ensure the maintenance of truth,

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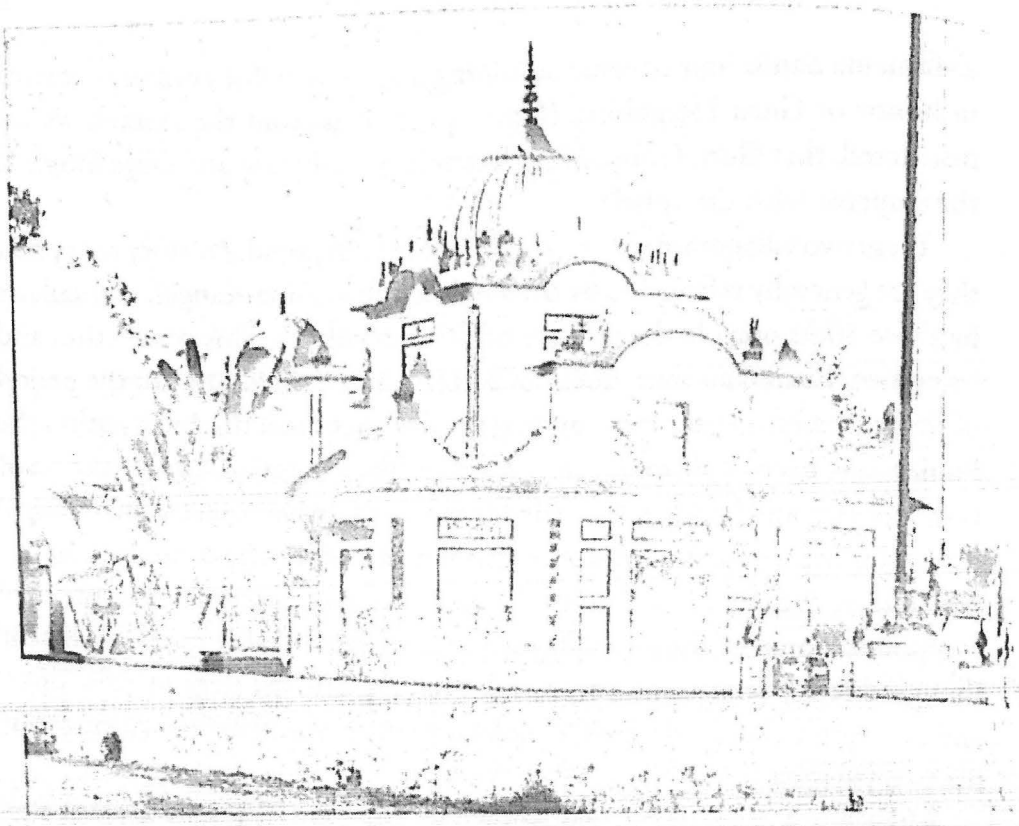

FIGURE 2.1. Gurdwara Zafarnama Sahib in Village Kangar. Photo by author, December 2010.

virtue, and righteousness; that very dharma in other words that the tenth Guru spreads in *Bachitar Nāṭak* 8:1–3.[41]

Within the last forty years, moreover, the memory of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* itself and its purported history has been symbolically incorporated and instantiated into the very landscape and architecture of rural Punjab, simultaneously shaping and keeping memories of Anandpur's traumatic evacuation and its consequences alive. Not only do we find a number of gurdwaras that have been erected commemorating the epistle's southward journey in the hands of Bhai Daya Singh (Gurdwara Bhai Sahib Bhai Daya Singh ji in Dhawni Mohalla, in Aurangabad, Maharashtra), but there are two gurdwaras, *Zafarnāmā Gurdwārā Lohgaṛh Sāhib Piṇḍ Dīnā Patiśāhi Dasvīn* in village Dina (which although in Moga is sometimes said to be in Bathinda as it is situated on the boundary separating the two districts) constructed on the spot where the tenth Guru is believed to have taken his rest in the *chubārā* (a room in the upper story) of a local Sikh named Bhai Desu Tarkhan (and where the Guru remained for 3 months and 13 days, claims a sign that comes into view as soon as one enters the gurdwara compound) after he had apparently written the *Ẓafar-nāmah* at the nearby village of Kangar (in district Bathinda), where we find the rather modest Gurdwara

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Zafarnama Sahib immediately adjoining a more fanciful gurdwara erected in honor of Guru Hargobind (figure 2.1).[42] It is from the former, we are instructed, that Guru Gobind Singh sent Bhais Dharam and Daya Singh to the emperor with the epistle.

These two villages are so interconnected in Sikh popular history today that they are generally referred to by the single name of Dina-Kangar, particularly by those Sikhs outside the vicinity of the two villages. This connection and its nomenclature, however, does not seem to have existed prior to the period of the tenth Guru;[43] notwithstanding the fact that short distances within the Punjab have been made much more manageable thanks to the introduction of cars, scooters, and bicycles, the intimate relationship between the two villages has itself likely come into existence also as a part of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s narrative; and so indirectly the letter's "history" has been inscribed into the very compound name of the two villages and is therefore liable to evoke distant though directly related memories of the tenth Guru, the siege of Anandpur, and ultimately the epistle itself, couplets of which are celebrated throughout the two villages.

Although Kangar (also now known as *Diālpurā Bāīkā* or *Bhekā*) was acknowledged as having had been home to Rai Jodh, one of Guru Hargobind's disciples (whose descendants still possess a dagger the sixth Master had gifted him),[44] the gurdwara associated with the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was apparently built here in the early eighteenth century after Bhai Mani Singh had instructed local Sikhs to ensure the spot remained sanctified.[45] In fact the site of the two villages was so well known that in the 1970s, Dina-Kangar became a stopping point along the newly constructed Guru Gobind Singh Marg envisioned by the Punjab government under Giani Zail Singh,[46] and is marked as one of the twenty memorials along the near 600-kilometer route. As such it possesses one of the twenty, five-sided memorial markers (*lāṭṭhān*), the fifth side of which contains a description of the specific site's significance to the memory of the Sikh past in Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, and English.[47] On the spot where Gurdwara Zafarnama Sahib is situated, we are also told, was the house of the Sikh with whom Daya Singh resided while he waited for his traveling companion Bhai Dharam Singh to return with instructions from the Guru. Although the construction of the gurdwara and the road itself was clearly enmeshed within, and a product of, postcolonial (as well as modernist and memory) politics and thus a significant part of the Congress and Zail Singh agenda to beat the Akalis at their own game so to speak, it nevertheless helped further cement a particularly modern understanding of the Guru's epistle (to which we shall return)—perhaps also giving shape to contemporary political

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struggles in which some Sikhs in the Punjab were embroiled with the central government—helping to shape the history and memory of this letter of Guru Gobind Singh and as well the overall interpretation of the tenth Sikh Master's ultimate mission, the destruction of tyranny.[48] No doubt the Fateh Diwas or Victory Day celebrations that were held on 13 November 2006 at Gurdwara Zafarnama Sahib, after the approval by the Jathedar of the Akal Takht, to commemorate the sending of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* to Aurangzeb helped further shape these memories.[49]

Although many contemporary scholars see the *Ẓafar-nāmah* as a unique text within the Dasam Granth, it does appear as the first of twelve "stories" or *ḥikāyats* written also in Persian and commonly transcribed into Gurmukhi script.[50] Precedents for the tenth Guru's *Ḥikāyats* are many within the literary history of northern India, whether originating within the Islamicate or within the Indic world. While the *Hitopadeśa*, *Pañchatantra*, Arabian Nights, or *Kalīlah va Dimnah* suggest themselves, perhaps the most significant of these models would be Sadiduddin Muhammad 'Aufi's well-known early thirteenth-century *Javāmi'u'lḥikāyāt va Lavāmi'u'rrivāyāt* (*A Collection of Stories and Illuminations from History*) composed of two thousand such stories,[51] although unlike the latter, the *Ḥikāyats* occasionally demonstrate a rather scattered knowledge of Islam,[52] noting in *Ḥikāyat* 4 for example that the prince of the story, Subhat Singh, will not wed a besotted admirer as he is both already married and *kah qaul-i qur'ān ast qasm-i rasūl* "because it is [against] the dictates of the Qur'an and the oath taken before the Messenger of God (that is, the Prophet Muhammad)."[53] Although the specific promise to the Prophet is not mentioned, it may allude to the *bay'at al-nisā* or "the pledge of the women," which tradition claims Muhammad's first disciples from Medina took in his presence at al-'Aqbah (the hill between Mecca and Mina), an oath of loyalty that included among its provisions that the oath swearer pledge "not to steal or fornicate."[54] This would not really align with the context of *Ḥikāyat* 4, in which Subhat Singh is invited to wed the Hindu princess Bacchtramati, as any such pairing afterward would occur within the confines of marriage thus excluding any sense of fornication.[55] Nor does the first portion of the *meṣra'* measure up to Islamic precedent as it is quite clear that a man is allowed to marry as many as four wives as outlined in Qur'an 4:3, an article that was very well known in eighteenth-century India—although in reality one could imagine that marriage to only one wife was the norm for those Muslims and Hindus who would have formed the audience for such stories. It is true that Qur'an 4:3 states that four wives is the limit, but it nevertheless clearly encourages men to marry only one woman.

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This nominal understanding of Islamic models should not indicate, however, that the author of these stories was unfamiliar with Islamicate narratives and standards, for alongside the above-mentioned sources and precedents for the *Ḥikāyats* we would also include Ferdausi's *Shāh-nāmah*, the Islamicate text par excellence, direct and indirect references to which we discover throughout the Guru's Persian tales. In fact, not only do we find a reference to the great Iranian warrior Rostam in *Ḥikāyat* 4 and allusions to the Kayanid dynasty from which the kings of Iran are descended,[56] but *Ḥikāyat* 7 is a very brief and modified retelling of the story of the *Shāh-nāmah*'s only female "king," Homay (the daughter of Esfandyar's son, Bahman), and that of Homay's own son Darab who was hidden away as an infant and subsequently floated in a basket (here, a sealed box) down the river where he was retrieved from *dar āb* (lit., "within the water") by a fuller and brought up with no knowledge of his luminous pedigree.[57]

Such are the stories within the *Ḥikāyats*, narratives containing accounts of kings, princes, and princesses, some sincere, others not so, some fooled, others fooling; of convivial feasts and battles; of warrior men and women; of religious personnel and their general failings; of deceitful husbands, wives, and paramours and the consequences of their misdeeds. To this we add reflections on statecraft and examples of what was considered proper and improper conduct. To affix a certain realistic texture to these stories we occasionally have historical figures make an appearance such as Sher Shah Suri, an anecdote of whom is told by the prince of Kalinjar (in front of whose fort Sher Shah famously died in 1545),[58] and the emperor Jahangir, who emerges in *Ḥikāyat* 5 in his well-known capacity as the arbiter of justice.[59]

Jahangir also takes part in the *Pakhyān Charitr* (though in a very different context),[60] which suggests that the accounts within the *Ḥikāyats* may reference or are much like those *charitrs* we discover within the so-called Tales of Character (the two compositions are often noted in the same breath), though with relatively far less of the latter's more scatological and erotic dimensions.[61] It may well be that certain *Ḥikāyats* are actually Persianized adaptions, and thus to a large extent Islamicized (well, nominally Islamicized) variations of specific *charitrs* within the *Pakhyān Charitr*. Most scholars of the Sikh tradition generally and those of the Dasam Granth specifically make this claim.[62] It is perhaps for these reasons therefore that the *Ḥikāyats* are never referenced within the *rahit-nāmā* literature and rarely included in English translations of the Dasam Granth.[63] (Although the *rahit-nāmās* do include quotations from within the less controversial *charitrs*, especially the *Benatī Chaupaī*, which is the epilogue of the *Pakhyān Charitr*).[64]

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The *Ḥikāyats* are thus today among the least examined components of the Dasam Granth because of their often scandalous subject matter. This is not the only reason why they are ignored, however. For not only are the *Ḥikāyats* in Persian, but also, at least to many Sikhs, these appear to be unrelated to the Guru's letter.[65] Certainly the *Ẓafar-nāmah* and *Ḥikāyats* differ in many respects. Every *Ḥikāyat* apart from the first, that is the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, for example, ends with an impassioned request to the *sāqī* or cup-bearer to bestow upon the seeker the cup of intoxicating wine (either green—perhaps spiked with *bhaṅg*—or red) that brings enlightenment, a common trope in mystical Sufi Persian ghazal poetry.[66] We may note furthermore that unlike *Ḥikāyats* 2–12, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* proper is not referenced as *Ḥikāyat Avval* or *Ḥikāyat Pahilī*, "The First Story," in the earliest manuscript record, an indication we discover within today's Dasam Granth.[67] This last point suggests of course that the *Ḥikāyats* were added to the *Ẓafar-nāmah* after the text's initial writing or appearance. These must have been added quite soon afterward as we find them within the earliest *nasta'līq* copy of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* I have seen, that is within the *New Delhi Manī Siṅgh Wālī Bīṛh* whose Gurmukhi contents are dated 1713 CE.

These differences notwithstanding, the Persian *Ḥikāyats* share the same meter as the Guru's epistle as well as the occasional admonition and moral teaching, and the narrative format; at least one-third of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* attempts to narrate the Sikh past, to recite a story or *ḥikāyat*, while another third comments upon that past. Many *ḥikāyats*, moreover, the two lengthiest of these stories in particular (numbers 4 and 10), contain battle scenarios like those we find in certain *charitrs* of the *Pakhyān Charitr* and which are very close in spirit to the conflict narrated within the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. These also appropriate the same *Shāh-nāmah*-esque Persian style as the epistle.[68] In rare instances, we also find a *bait* of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* repeated within a *ḥikāyat*.[69]

To these parallels we may add the similar themes that we find in both the *Ḥikāyats* and the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, namely those of leadership and kingship, which help tie these Persian texts together with the more controversial Brajbhasha compositions that are also a part of the Dasam Granth such as the *Pakhyān Charitr* and the goddess narratives.[70] Both *Ḥikāyats* 2 and 3 stand out in this regard,[71] the former of which portrays the characteristic contest between sons for their father the king's mantle, a narrative we find in both Indic and Islamicate sources.[72] In *Ḥikāyat* 2, for example, three sons are given as a test abundant implements of war and of commerce (elephants and horses and camels) to see how they fare with their use, while the fourth son, Dalip, is only given two kernels of pulse (a single mung daal and a chickpea). The first

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three generally squander their gifts in the pursuit of war and profitless undertakings. Dalip, however, plants and tends his pulses and easily reproduces through the gradual investment of their rich yield all of the gifts bestowed upon his brothers and more, including enough capital to construct the city of Delhi. From the surplus produced by the mung seed, moreover, he also raises another city named Mungipatnam, literally the City of Mung. Rather than engage in war or in ventures with no gain with the vast numbers of elephants, camels, and horses he now possesses, he presents them all to his father and thus easily wins the contest. The father then banishes his three elder sons and passes the crown to the wise Raja Dalip. The lessons for leadership are here seemingly instrumental and obvious, and appear very much to be rooted in the local context of northern India (perhaps specific to the Punjab itself): carefully tending the land and thus by extension one's empire along with respect and reverence shown to one's parents and elders are far more constructive and fructifying than war and waste, metaphors one also discovers in the Adi Granth[73] and, too, within the Brajbhasha *kabitts* of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla:

ਤੁਸ ਮੈ ਤੁੰਦਲ ਬੋਏ ਨਿਪਜੈ ਸਹੰਸ੍ਰ ਗੁਨੋ ਦੇਹ ਧਾਰਿ ਕਰਤ ਹੈ ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰ ਜੀ ।[74]

When one kernel (*tuṣ*) is sown thousands of rice grains (*tundal boe*) are reaped. Acquiring such [a magnanimous] form [the single kernel] distributes its benevolence.

It is in *Ḥikāyat* 2 as well that we encounter another theme consonant with one that often resounds throughout the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, one's trust in and reliance upon the divine. *Ḥikāyat* 2:10 among many others states for example that

هران کس که یزدان یاری دهد بکار جهان کامگاری دهد[75]

Anyone whom the Lord befriends is empowered to perform all of the world's tasks.

This empowerment comes to the surface time and time again throughout *Ḥikāyat* 10, which follows certain mystical themes we clearly perceive in the stories of Waris Shah's Hir Ranjha, Mirza Sahiban, and, particularly, Leyli o Majnun, the famous Sufi allegorical romance popularised in Shaikh Nizami's twelfth-century quintet of tales, the *Khamsah*. Although there are clear

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differences between these allegories and *Ḥikāyat* 10, the Guru's tale nevertheless comes complete with a young man and woman meeting and falling in love at first sight in a *maktab*, wine-drinking parties and intoxication, the *zikr* (remembrance) of the beloved, the union of lover and beloved, and the various dangers that pious souls encounter along the mystical path. Despite the many horrendous perils in which our joined lovers find themselves (confronted by both sea and land monsters as well as human antagonists), the Lord always protects them in much the same way we infer that the tenth Guru himself was protected after the evacuation of Anandpur, a theme that dominates *bait*s 97–104 of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. It is through the Lord's grace that the two lovers come out of their African battles unscathed, battle narratives that focus predominantly upon prowess and bloodshed much like accounts we find in the goddess tales attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, although the *ḥikāyat*'s account clearly includes an allegorical dimension as the names of the two lovers indicate (*Raushan Dīmāgh*, Enlightened Mind, and *Raushan Żamīr*, Enlightened Consciousness). Only when the two are united can the true mystic proceed along the torturous spiritual path (*rāh-i por khūn*, "the way filled with blood" in Maulana Rumi's words) with confidence, assured of the Lord's support.

There is as well another feature that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* and *Ḥikāyats* have in common, that neither of these begin with the traditional opening invocation common to Persian manuscripts of the Indo-Timurid period, that is "In the Name of..."[76] Although there are certain Indian Sufi allegorical romances that also do not begin their praise of God (Per: *ḥamd*) with this common invocation,[77] its absence within the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is perhaps an attempt to clearly distinguish the author's community and tradition from that of the emperor, perhaps following precedents we observe within Mughal sources themselves.[78] Such shared attributes would have permitted early eighteenth-century Sikhs to effortlessly understand the two works as intimately connected, as part of a single whole; and to claim that both sets of texts were dispatched to the emperor by the tenth Guru.[79]

To further enhance this connection, it seems likely that early Sikh writers (or the Guru himself)—perhaps recognizing that a link between the stories and the Guru's letter is very difficult, if not impossible, to apprehend—prepared four additional couplets inserted at the end of *bait* 111 to form a thematic bridge of sorts between these two works (certain manuscript copies of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* situate these four at the beginning of the second *ḥikāyat*, thus allowing the *Ẓafar-nāmah* proper to retain its independence and its more common 111-*bait* structure).[80] I assume these four to be a somewhat later

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insertion because the *baits* are composed of predominantly Indic rather than Persian words and are reminiscent of Akal Purakh's attributes as found in Guru Gobind Singh's *Jāpu Sāhib* (the first two words of the last line are, however, in Persian), and seem to echo, in Brajbhasha, some of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s introductory Persian *baits* (compare the last line [*bait* 115] to the second *meṣraʿ* of *bait* 4 for example). Although they are apparently later additions, these four couplets were nevertheless included very soon after the first *Ẓafar-nāmah* was drafted as these are discovered within the copy of the Guru's epistle found in the *New Delhi Manī Siṅgh Wālī Bīṛh* written in Persian script.[81] The Gurmukhi Indic-language lines appear as follows:

ਅਰੰਜੋ ਅਭੰਜੋ ਅਰੂਪ ਅਰੇਖ । ਅਗਾਧੋ ਅਬਾਧੋ ਅਭਰਮੋ ਅਲੇਖ । ਅਰਾਗੋ ਅਰੂਪ ਅਰੇਖੋ ਅਰੰਗ । ਅਜਨਮੋ ਅਬਰਨੋ ਅਭੂਤੋ ਅਭੰਗ । ਅਛੇਦੋ ਅਭੇਦੋ ਅਕਰਮੋ ਅਕਾਮ । ਅਖੇਦੋ ਅਭੇਦੋ ਅਭਰਮੋ ਅਭਾਮ । ਅਰੇਖੋ ਅਭੇਖੋ ਅਲੇਖੋ ਅਭੰਗ । ਕੁਦਾਵੰਦ ਬਖਸ਼ਿੰਦਹੇ ਰੰਗ ਰੰਗ ।[82]

Indestructible and unbreakable; formless, unknowable
Unfathomable and obstructionless; doubtless and inscrutable
Without attachment, without form; impenetrable and without colour
Birthless and casteless; elementless and unbreakable
Imperishable and distinctionless; without activity and without lust
Without suffering and distinctions; without misgiving and passionless
Beyond knowing and belonging to none; enigmatic and without pause:
[So is] the Master [who] bestows [the following] joys and delights.

It is likely here, taking my cue from Professor Shackle's understanding of these four couplets, that the *raṅg raṅg*, "joys and delights," of the last line are perhaps meant to introduce and describe the eleven *ḥikāyats* that follow the *Ẓafar-nāmah*.[83] This connection is quite likely when one considers, as earlier mentioned, that the closing lines of every *ḥikāyat* include a request for either a green-colored or red-colored elixir (*rang* in Persian and Brajbhasha [*raṅg*] also means "color" or "hue").[84] This is the case despite the fact that the word *rang* itself only appears at the end of three *ḥikāyats*.

With all of this in mind, therefore, let us be clear that within the vast majority of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *Ẓafar-nāmah* manuscripts one discovers in northern India, the *Ḥikāyats* are an inextricable part of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, both texts of which are referred to collectively as the *Ẓafar-nāmah* in the opening lines of these handwritten documents.[85] And, as well, this is the way that the text of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was understood by most if

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not all eighteenth-century Sikhs. According to the early nineteenth-century *gur-bilās* text attributed to Koer Singh, for example,

> ਜਫਰ ਨਾਮ ਹੈ ਸਭ ਜਗ ਜਾਨੈ । ਲਿਖੀ ਹਿਕਾਯਤ ਦ੍ਵਾਦਸ ਤਾ ਮੈ । ਸੂਬੇ ਉਮਰਾਵਨ ਕੀ ਬਾਤਾ । ਤਾ ਮੈ ਲਿਖੇ ਸੁ ਪੁਰਖ ਬਿਧਾਤਾ । ਬਾਦਸਾਹਨ ਕੀ ਕਥਾ ਸੁ ਜਾਨੋ । ਪੈਕੰਬਰ ਕੇ ਭੇਦ ਪ੍ਰਮਾਨੋ ।[86]
>
> The entire world knows of the Epistle of Victory within which twelve stories (*hikāyat*) are written. Within these are written the accounts of provincial nobles and the ways of men. It tells the tale of kings and discloses the distinctions between [genuine and false] spiritual masters.

Although Koer Singh here not only makes clear the popularity of the *Ẓafar-nāmah–Ḥikāyats* among his precolonial Punjabi Sikh audience (*sabh jag jānai*), he also strongly suggests the written nature (*likhī*) of the *Ẓafar-nāmah-Ḥikāyats*. The fact that the vast majority of *Ẓafar-nāmah* manuscripts that I have seen demonstrate only negligible variations supports such views. It is however possible that the reason for the combination of these two texts as one complete set may also stem from the way in which these texts were delivered and understood by eighteenth-century Sikhs predating the production of both Koer Singh's and Sukkha Singh's works in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Perhaps the *Ẓafar-nāmah–Ḥikāyats* may have formed a performative repertoire for *kathākar*s and other storytellers since the 111-*bait Ẓafar-nāmah* is far too short for a sustained performance.

For whatever reasons these texts were combined, however, the bundling we observe within the Dasam Granth today follows precedents we find in these earliest *Ẓafar-nāmah–Ḥikāyats* manuscripts, a model that has been in place since at least the early 1740s (perhaps even earlier) as both Sewa Das's *Parchiān Pātiśāhī Dasvīn kī* (Introductory [Stories] of the Tenth King) implies[87] and certain manuscript copies of the Dasam Granth (as opposed to stand-alone manuscripts of the *Ẓafar-nāmah–Ḥikāyats*) suggest,[88] and continues through both the later eighteenth century as Kesar Singh Chhibbar implies in his *Bańsāvalī-nāmā*[89] and well into the nineteenth as both Giani Gian Singh's late nineteenth-century *Panth Prakāś* and his early twentieth-century *Tavārīkh Gurū Khālsā* indicate.[90] These points notwithstanding, when later early twentieth-century narratives of the Guru's glory and others mention the *Ẓafar-nāmah* it seems that they are only referring to the 111-*bait* Persian text portion of it, and not the *Ẓafar-nāmah–Ḥikāyats* collectively (understandable, this, as it is quite difficult to imagine a context in which the

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tenth Guru would bother sending such anecdotes to the emperor, stories so seemingly unrelated to his own experiences with the Mughals and the pahari rajas. These are accounts which may reflect some of the tenth Guru's concerns with leadership, authority, power, and morality and are thus well suited to the context of the Dasam Granth, but these nevertheless utterly lack the forthright rebuke, demands, and thick intertextual resonances within the 111-*bait Ẓafar-nāmah* proper) while earlier *gur-bilās* texts make it clear that theirs suggest the combination of the two.[91]

In regard to the inclusion of the *Ẓafar-nāmah–Ḥikāyats* within what would become the Dasam Granth, it is very difficult to accurately assess when these were admitted into the tome and why. Not only are these issues profoundly interconnected with the opaque history of the compendium's compilation and its beatification[92] for lack of a better word but, as we shall see, there may well have been some hesitation on the part of those poets and Sikhs closest to the tenth Guru to grant this epistle the same type of sacerdotal status bestowed upon other words attributed to the Sikh Gurus.

Certainly, the earliest known Dasam Granth manuscripts do include the *Ẓafar-nāmah–Ḥikāyats* although the latter, particularly for those manuscripts dated before 1706 CE, is always a later addition.[93] Within the *Anandpur Bīṛh*, for example, the Gurmukhi *Ẓafar-nāmah–Ḥikāyats* lack the folio numbers we see in other segments of the recension, thereby implying that these were only subsequently added.[94] These implications also surface with the actual inclusion of folio numbers in regard to certain post-1706 *bīṛhs*. The 1713 *New Delhi Manī Siṅgh Wālī Bīṛh*, for example, includes a *nasta'līq* version of the *Ẓafar-nāmah–Ḥikāyats* that is numbered in Gurmukhi and in reverse order, following the left-to-right folio orientation of Gurmukhi manuscripts rather than the right-to-left pagination common in Persian manuscripts: the last folio of this collection is numbered first (f. 1090) and the first last (f. 1095).[95] We see this as well in a number of early Dasam Granth *bīṛhs* such as the *Ẓafar-nāmah* that appears within the beautifully decorated Dasam Granth manuscript known as the *Paṭṇe jī dī Misal Bīṛh* that is dated S. 1822/1765 CE (*sammat aṭhārā sai bāī*) on folio 616a. This *bīṛh* actually includes the epistle (and the *Ḥikāyats*) in both *nasta'līq* and Gurmukhi text (*nasta'līq* fols. 621–28; Gurmukhi fols. 601–5).[96]

As to when the *Ẓafar-nāmah–Ḥikāyats* became securely set within the canon, that is the Dasam Granth, we cannot say with certainty at this time. On the one hand, one may conjecture that it was only relatively recently as there are a number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century manuscripts of this massive compendium of texts that do not include it.[97] On the other hand,

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however, one can also assume that these were included (or better yet revered as the Dasam Granth was not compiled until well after the tenth Guru's demise) relatively early, perhaps within just a few years of Guru Gobind Singh's death in 1708.

Here we turn to the question as to why these compositions were included in a text the majority of whose compositions were in Brajbhasha and whose materials derived almost exclusively from multiple and multivocal Puranic and *itihāsic* Indic sources. Certainly there are themes within the *Ẓafar-nāmah* that are consonant with those Dasam Granth compositions that allude to "Puranic" sources; we have already noted this in regard to themes of kingship and leadership and the establishment and maintenance of dharma and justice, which the trope of the recurring sword (whether double or single edged) appears to convey, but we may here point specifically to Persian poetic matters of *razm* (battle) and *bazm* (delight), which are somewhat compatible with the *vīr ras* (heroic sentiment) and *śriṅgar-ras* (erotic sentiment) of Sanskrit and Brajbhasha poetics,[98] but inclusion in the Dasam Granth was not based solely upon corresponding values and themes (if at all). Not only were these Persian compositions attributed to the tenth Guru and thus sacred—both because of the Guru's apparent allocation of Guruship to the words uttered by, with all due respect, the dead Gurus (that is, the Guru Granth Sahib) before his own death and the belief that this letter contained his "essence" (i.e., Guru substance) in the sense that this substance passed through his hand, which came into contact with the instrument that wrote these texts—but also such an inclusion would have rounded out his court culturally, enhancing its power and its prestige in the process. After all, the standard of courtly comportment and ceremony that was generally followed and simultaneously contested by the tenth Guru's courtly entourage was that of the Mughal darbar (recall that this was the only style of government and court with which the tenth Guru and his Sikhs were intimately familiar) and thus the inclusion of Persian compositions in his court's oeuvre alongside its Brajbhasha works would have most likely been deemed essential and have well served the aims of later Sikh hagiographers who looked back nostalgically to the Guru's beloved (and now mythic) darbar, rivaling that of the emperor himself,[99] and assigning to that period a heightened morality and grandeur in a current time of despair and, frankly put for Sikh authors of the *gur-bilās* and *rahit-nāmā* literature, lack of patronage.[100]

Persian was, after all, the classical language of the Islamicate and the *Shāh-nāmah* perhaps its preeminent text. With such in mind, therefore, one may propose viewing the Dasam Granth from another angle, as one could argue

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that the literary culture of the Guru's darbar was in dialogue not only with the classical precedents of its two principal languages of poetry, Brajbhasha and Persian, but also with the literary culture of the Mughal court whose famed poets likewise prepared their works in Persian and Brajbhasha alike by drawing upon a classical Sanskritic and Persian repertoire with which they too were in a sustained engagement.[101] The Dasam Granth may therefore serve as a multilingual archive of the tenth Guru's court, allowing us to form a more complete picture of Guru Gobind Singh's understanding of himself and his Sikhs and their place in a symbolic universe shaped by both Indic and Islamicate pasts.

One other variable to include within this equation is the neighboring Rajput pahari courts. For while these courts also displayed their cultural and symbolic credentials to themselves, rival Rajput courts, and the Mughals through the patronage of vernacular and classical poetry, including bhakti, heroic, and *rīti* styles alike, their interests and support did not generally turn to Persian poetry (although the far-off court of the Maratha leader Shivaji Bhonsale is here an exception).[102] As far as I know, the only non-Muslim court in the pahari region which did patronize Persian literature was the Guru's, as we can see through the preeminence of Bhai Nand Lal Goya in eighteenth-century Sikh tradition and the large number of manuscript copies of his Persian texts, particularly those more intimately associated with the tenth Guru such as the *Zindagī-nāmah*. Such patronage may have been a way of asserting a cultural supremacy over, or resistance to, local Rajput courts whose conflicts with the Guru are well known, or simply a way of advocating one of Guru Gobind Singh's most sustained messages: that the God of us all is accessible through all languages; that the sovereign God of us all is Persian, Arabic, and no doubt Brajbhasha.[103] The Dasam Granth may be the textual representation of the tenth Guru's cultural, ideological, and political posture.

The *Ẓafar-nāmah–Ḥikāyats* may therefore be seen as the rightful and formal conclusion to the Dasam Granth, for in this letter we find the sovereignty of Guru Gobind Singh and by extension the Sikhs proclaimed loudly and clearly, a sovereignty to which the other texts within the Dasam Granth allude and to which these ultimately build up, but a dominion that these nevertheless fall short of expressing as clearly as the *Ẓafar-nāmah*.[104] And it is with such claims in mind that later Sikh historiography would convey the devastating power of the tenth Guru's pointed epistle.

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3

The Text of the Ẓafar-Nāmah:

GURU GOBIND SINGH, FERDAUSI, AND SA'DI

چـه خـوش گـفـت فـردوسـی خـوش زبـان[1]

How beautifully the sweet-tongued Ferdausi has spoken.

AS A TEXT in and of itself, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* sans *Ḥikāyats* follows the standards of all good Persian poetry (notwithstanding the apparent lack of an opening couplet nor some *baits* the bad grammar of which may lead to a number of suggestions in regard to the original text, a point we shall note momentarily), particularly the *maṡnavī* of which it is an example. The accepted text as we today find it within the Dasam Granth contains 111 *baits* or couplets,[2] all of which follow a strict rhyme scheme (AA BB CC etc.) and a specific meter; in the latter case this is quite significant as it is that of Ferdausi's famous *Shāh-nāmah* (Book of Kings) written in the *mutaqārib* meter, which may have been earlier used in Arabic poetry or so some scholars claim.[3] Its first twelve *baits* combine an invocation to the divine (Per: *ḥamd*; *akāl purakh dī mahimā* according to Gian Singh)[4] and the praise of the Prophet Muhammad (Ar: *na'ṯ*), drawing upon Arabic and Persian terms of glory, an exordium one discovers in virtually all classical Persian texts and letters, such as for example Shaikh Sa'di's *Būstān* (Orchard);[5] Nizami's *Haft Paikar*;[6] and within India itself, Amir Khusrau Dihlavi's extraordinary works.[7] While so exhorting in this segment of the letter, Melikian-Chirvani tells us that the author is, in his choice of divine epithets, foreshadowing the coming censure of the emperor we find in the *dāstān* (the "story" section, which begins at *bait* 13) by here subtly rebuking Aurangzeb. God is both the *amān-bakhsh* or "Giver of safe passage" (*bait* 2) and the *shahanshāh* the "king of kings" (*bait* 3), the latter term of which was regularly used by Mughal writers to describe the emperor—and

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which is appropriated twice, perhaps sarcastically, to do just this in *bait*s 89 and 94.[8] But this is the true king of kings who needs no courtly symbols such as those on which human emperors rely: *na sāz o na bāz o na fauj o na farsh*, "no accoutrements, no falcon, no army, and no carpet [has He/She/It] (*bait* 4)."[9] As both *amān-bakhsh* and *shahanshāh* are epithets rarely found in glorifying the divine in Persian poetry, it is very likely these provided reminders that God is what the emperor is not and that He/She/It provides that which the king neglects: God is the true king of kings who provided the safe passage that Aurangzeb initially guaranteed, but purposely failed to fulfill.[10]

Before we carry on, the apparently puzzling reference to the Prophet Muhammad above deserves explanation.[11] Within the opening invocation there are two *bait*s that briefly merit consideration in this regard. These two couplets appear within the earliest *nasta'līq Ẓafar-nāmah* I have seen (circa 1713 CE perhaps) as well as within the Gurmukhi text later appended to the *Anandpūrī Bīṛh* manuscript of the Dasam Granth (circa 1700 CE). As well these are carried by the standard recension of the text found within the Tenth Lord's book. This was recently translated into English blank verse by Professor Shackle, but I would like to render the following two *bait*s somewhat more generously:

شریعت پرست و فضیلت مآب حقیقت شناس و نبی الکتاب

که دانش پژوه است و صاحب شعور حقیقت شناس است و ظاهر ظهور[12]

> The one who treads the straight path to water/Observer of the *sharī'a* (*sharī'at-parast*) who is gifted with perfection; the Prophet of the Book mindful of the [veiled] Truth; He is the Knowledge-seeker possessing total awareness; The one who knows the [concealed] Truth and whose splendor is apparent.

Although Professor Shackle's translation is, as always, concise and very fine, the understanding behind his rendering, as with virtually all English and Brajbhasha/Punjabi interpretations of these *bait*s, is that here we have a reference to the one God of whom the Guru regularly speaks throughout both his Brajbhasha works and the *Ẓafar-nāmah*.[13] These two *bait*s, however, as Melikian-Chirvani was the first to point out, simply cannot address the divine as these run counter to understandings of mainstream Islamic theology: how, for example, can God or Allah who knows all, search for knowledge (*dāneshpazhūh*)? How, moreover, can He/She/It be the "prophet of the book/scripture/Qur'an" (*nabīulkitāb*) when a prophet or *nabī* (or *rasūl*, "messenger")

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in Islam is clearly a non-divine human being chosen by Allah as implied in Qur'an 4:69?[14] Melikian-Chirvani states that the misunderstanding "may be due to the fact that [within the epistle] the Prophet is never referred to by his name, Muhammad...."[15] This conjecture may only partially explain the oversight. As Guru Gobind Singh was certainly not a Muslim, I would like to make the case (as both Punjabi and English translations invariably do—albeit tacitly) that these two *baits* avoided detection as references to the Prophet because these were read not in the straightforward manner that I outlined, but rather with a sense of bewilderment that would accord well with Sikh poetry in both Brajbhasha and Punjabi: God is both the seeker of knowledge and the knowledge itself; both the prophet of the book and the book; both the law and its upholder. Refracted through such a lens, Ratan Singh Jaggi's assessment that "in the *Zafar-nāmā* there is nothing contrary to Sikh doctrines, to the understanding of [God's] qualitylessness (*nirguṇī*) nor to the tenth Guru's conception of his beloved deity," makes perfect sense,[16] thus precluding any awkwardness that later eighteenth-century Sikh authors (and even later authors) may have felt at such praise of the prophet of those men whom they understood to be the enemies of the Khalsa.[17] The tenth Guru was nevertheless at least basically familiar with Islamic theology (as we can see in the *Jāpu* that begins the Dasam Granth), in which the position of the Prophet Muhammad is of course a particularly lofty one; and in a letter addressed to a specifically erudite Muslim audience, in Persian no less, the wondrous understanding of these two *baits* would seem to me unlikely and out of place. I would thus concur with Melikian-Chirvani that these *baits* are descriptions of the Prophet Muhammad, whom later Sufis referred to as the *insān-i kamāl* or perfect man.[18] Yet as this is a versed rather than prose letter, we may also speculate that the Guru could be referring to both the Prophet and the divine simultaneously, through the common Persian literary device of *īhām*. In this case, Muslims would have taken to one particular understanding of these *baits* while Sikhs to another.

There is more to say in this regard. Such positive descriptives of the Prophet Muhammad and of Islam and Muslims are very rare in Sikh literature, almost nonexistent within the later *rahit-nāmā* and *gur-bilās* texts,[19] but do sparingly occur in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Persian Sikh literature as well as earlier Sikh lore.[20] Notwithstanding the fact that there are Muslim poets whose poetry appears within the Guru Granth Sahib, notably Shaikhs Farid and Bhikan respectively, among the most positive famous allusions to Muslims are those contained within two well-known Sikh traditions.[21] The first claims that the foundation stone of Harimandir Sahib was laid in 1588 CE by the

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Qadiri Sufi saint, Baba Sain Mir Muhammad, who was known popularly as Mian Mir (and who is also said to have been refused permission by Guru Arjan to allow him to petition the Mughal authorities to forego the Guru's imprisonment).[22] The second notes that Malerkotla, a predominantly Muslim town within the Punjab, had been spared the ravages of Banda Bahadar in the early eighteenth century, the riots of the Partition of British India in 1947, and as well the attacks by Sikh militants that were a regular part of Punjabi life in districts Gurdaspur, Amritsar, and Ferozepur in the mid-1980s–early '90s because the town had been blessed by the tenth Guru after he had heard that the Nawab of Malerkotla, Sher Muhammad Khan, who had actually sided with the Mughals during the battle and subsequent siege of Anandpur, petitioned the emperor Aurangzeb to spare the lives of the *chhoṭe sāhibzāde*.[23] (Both of these narratives may have been aimed at easing any tensions that existed between Muslims and Sikhs of the respective periods during which these two anecdotes became popular.) The venerable *qazi* who appears throughout the fifth *Ḥikāyat* attributed to Guru Gobind Singh furthermore also springs to mind,[24] as too does the occasional manuscript copy of the *Dīvān* of Bhai Nand Lal Goya, on whose first folio appears the traditional Muslim opening invocation, the *bismallāh*, "In the Name of God the compassionate and merciful."[25] There is a *bait* in that collection furthermore that is too often refracted through later Sikh lenses in English translations of the *Dīvān-i Goyā*:

مصحف روی تو حافظ همه را در همه حال خم ابروی تو محراب دل و اهل نماز[26]

> The Qur'an (*muṣḥaf*)[27] of Your Face protects everyone in every condition. Your curved eyebrows are the *miḥrāb* of the heart to those people who recite the *namāz* (*ahl-i namāz*).

Charged with typical Islamic tropes and Islamicate terminology, there can be little doubt that the reference to the *ahl-i namāz* here is to the Muslim community (perhaps more specifically to the Sufis as the term *ḥāl*, literally "condition," also implies a level, or way-station as one progresses along the mystical path to annihilation, *fanā'*),[28] which is enjoined by the *sharī'a* to observe prayers (Per: *namāz*; Ar: *ṣalāt*) at five specific times during the day, an observance that forms one of the famous Five Pillars of Islam; and that the beloved whose Qur'an-face protects everyone is the one God worshiped by all people. Further *baits* which speak positively of Muslims and Islam also appear in Bhai Nand Lal's *Zindagī-nāmah*. *Bait* 19 for example tells us that:

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روز جمعه مومنان پاك باز گرد می آیند از بهر نماز[29]

Faithful Muslims (*mominān*) of good countenance gather together on Fridays for the sake of reciting prayers (*namāz*).

It seems to me that the clear and encouraging reference to the Prophet Muhammad in the *Ẓafar-nāmah* most certainly adds further weight to the belief that this letter was intended for a cultured Muslim audience and may as well have been originally penned by the Guru himself and not simply a "deliberate literary exercise."[30] We will return to the question of authorship in just a moment. For now, it is worth noting that (in Melikian-Chirvani's words), "This [reference to the Prophet Muhammad] would have been enough to win the respect of the entire Muslim community"[31] and would perhaps have ensured that the Guru's letter might have merited serious consideration by such. After all, Ferdausi's *Shāh-nāmah* itself, although clearly not an Islamic work, also includes in its introductory portion praises of the Prophet Muhammad (who is referred to as the *paighambar* by our esteemed tenth- and eleventh-century *dehqān*). Notwithstanding Ferdausi's own Shi'a inclinations, such acclaim may have been articulated because of the potential patron to whom he was appealing, namely the apparently religiously minded Sunni Muslim Mahmud of Ghazni (also Mahmud Ghaznavi) who had inherited the mantle of the Samanid empire of eastern Iran.[32] In the vast majority of compositions attributed to Guru Gobind Singh or to his court poets, the praises of the Hindu goddess, of divinized women like Sita and Radha; and of similarly divine men-gods such as Ram and Krishna are commonplace notwithstanding certain passages that note either that the Guru himself does not venerate these deities or that even such powerful beings themselves serve the Eternal Guru.[33] Is it too much to suggest therefore that within the historical context of the early eighteenth-century South Asian Islamicate the tenth Sikh Master was sure to respectfully refer to the revered Prophet of Islam in an epistle addressed to the Mughal emperor, particularly since the emperor Aurangzeb went to such great lengths to cultivate his reputation as a pious Muslim? I think not. Such references as this highlight a relationship between the tenth Guru, his Sikhs, the pahari rajas, and the Mughals far more varied than contemporary historians of the Sikh tradition suggest, obviously foreshadowing the later, nuanced relationships between Khalsa Sikhs themselves, and with the Mughals and others whom the Khalsa generally identified as Turk or Muslim, associations which counter

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the generally accepted wisdom of eighteenth-century Sikh-Muslim antipathy such as those that we note in the careers of illustrious Khalsa Sikh sardars like Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.[34] After all, it is quite likely that the reason early eighteenth-century Sikhs including Guru Gobind Singh as the author of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* and later Sikh tradition have more or less failed to specifically indict the pahari rajas with the same venom and volume we see directed toward the Mughal emperor is due to Sikh *birādarī* ties, both actual and mythic, to the Rajput houses of the pahari region, associations strongly implied in such Sikh works as the *Bachitar Nāṭak*, which posits a putative ancestor within the *Raghuvaṃśa* lineage common to both general groups.[35]

Let us now turn to the *dāstān*. The author begins this section in a very atypical manner: rather than the traditional address praising the emperor (*khiṭāb-i zamīnbūs*) he starts, as prefigured in section one, by castigating Aurangzeb's apparent perfidy (*baits* 13–15; 16–18 [indirectly] followed with further remonstrations in *baits* 45–50),[36] perhaps calling to mind the type of "blame poetry" we note in the apocryphal satire of Mahmud of Ghazni attributed to Ferdausi, a text undoubtedly well known to Mughal courtiers and just about anyone familiar with the story surrounding the Persian epic and Ferdausi's patron.[37] The author then explains his reason for appropriating such blame by apparently alluding to the events of the siege of Anandpur and its abandonment by the Sikhs after assurances and oaths from the Mughal commanders (*baits* 18, 21, 57).[38] We can only imagine how the author(s), whether the Guru or (a) pious Sikh(s), felt toward the man who was directly responsible for the murder of the tenth Master's father and indirectly for the murder of his sons and mother. (Let me add, however, that Sikh tradition strongly asserts that since the Guru had a spirit of extraordinary strength and resilience he was able to control his grief).[39] After some moralizing which is clearly Islamicate in tenor (*baits* 16–17, 22), the author then relates what may be occurrences during the Battle of Chamkaur in which two of the Guru's sons were killed (*baits* 19–21, 26–41, 44) after which we very briefly hear of the Guru's movements through Kangar and ultimately to Dina where the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was alleged to have been written (*bait* 59). Finally, the Guru actually makes his petition by requesting Aurangzeb to visit him in Kangar to set matters straight if the emperor is in fact "a man who believes in the one God" (*baits* 58–60, 63–64).[40] On at least one level, then, this is not so much a petition in the traditional sense as it is an admonition (*pand*) and an order, a breach of which will result in the most severe consequences for Aurangzeb.[41]

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Interspaced within these and often overlapping are maxims and morals regarding the importance of upholding one's oaths, particularly those taken upon the Qur'an—easily the most oft-repeated theme of the epistle, which clearly ties the various portions of the letter together, and the consequences of keeping and breaking them (*baits* 43, 44, 50–53, 55–57, 76–77, 84, 87, 109); further condemnations of the emperor who failed to act in accord with the principles of Islam, killed his own brothers, and imprisoned his father[42] (48, 49, 50, 66, 67–68, 69, 70, 79, 81, 85, 86, 87, and the second *meṣra'* of 94) along with his praises (89–93 and the first (possibly the second) *meṣra'* of 94);[43] descriptions of what we assume is the Guru himself, especially his trust in God (43–44, 60, 63–64, 88, 95, 98, 105–6); and a healthy dose of soteriological dictums, some of which ponder the inscrutability of fate (65, 66, 82, 83, 84, 96, 107–8). This is therefore far more than a mere linear story, far more than a *dāstān* in much the same way that the *Shāh-nāmah* is far more than merely a narrative of past Iranian kings.[44] Since perhaps the late eighteenth century, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* has become among other things a text which, like the Adi Granth and other Indo-Islamic-period texts, acts as a vehicle through which pious Sikhs symbolically recreate the presence of their Guru and take his *darśan*.

The Guru's *Ẓafar-nāmah*, like so many other contemporary examples of Persian poetry, also includes allusions to what we may call the Persian canon, namely the works of Ferdausi, Rumi, Nizami, Hafez, Sa'di,[45] and a few select others that erudite courtiers and writers used over many centuries to construct a literary culture with which all educated men and women and all nobles throughout the Islamicate would have been familiar, and references to which we discover in the writings of the Mughal emperors themselves.[46] Easily the most important Persian work with which the *Ẓafar-nāmah* intertextually resonates is Ferdausi's *Shāh-nāmah*. As we shall see, it is this text that was meant to serve as the model for the ethical and historical concerns of the Guru's epistle, an epic to which references, it bears repeating, would have been instantly recognized by Mughal courtiers as well as the emperor.[47] The choice of the *Shāh-nāmah* as a template for the *Ẓafar-nāmah* may also have served as a form of therapy, if I can be so anachronistic: a focused and creative way for Guru Gobind Singh to partially come to terms with and commemorate the loss of his much-loved sons and mother. In such a state, the tenth Guru may well have gravitated toward the *Shāh-nāmah* as Ferdausi himself laments the loss of his own beloved son within the text.[48]

This conjecture notwithstanding, clearly the author of the Epistle of Victory chose very carefully as this was no mere arbitrary decision: within

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Indo-Timurid Mughal culture the *Shāh-nāmah* was understood as far more than a versified account relating the ancient past of Iran's kings, their antagonistic relations with the rulers of Turan, and a tale of the lives and deeds of Iran's champions, the rulers of Sistan. It was perhaps with Alexander (Per: Eskandar) the Great's praise of India and her accomplished inhabitants ringing in their ears[49] that the Mughals, rather, understood the *Shāh-nāmah* (albeit unconsciously) as a cultural text (as did many others within the Persian-speaking world)[50] in that it possessed not only a special formative role in the construction of Mughal courtly society and the subjectivity of individuals within that circle, and thus a way, for the Mughal nobility and others, of understanding the world and themselves that provided a secure identity; but the text also held a normative authority in the sense that it codified norms of social behavior as well as presented the social and martial ideals to which Mughal nobles and others could aspire.[51] It is no surprise therefore that throughout Mughal chronicles one regularly comes across descriptives such as *rostam-ā'īn* or "Rostam-like" to illustrate a particularly audacious act; titles such as the Rostam of the Age applied to brave nobles and soldiers and sometimes to wrestlers (the Indian "world champion" is known even today as *Rostam-i Hind*, the Rostam of India); comparisons of present deeds to those of past Iranian kings whose lives are chronicled in the *Shāh-nāmah* or the likening of one's skills to the abilities that Ferdausi's protagonists had demonstrated in days gone by.[52] The last example we find in the description of the emperor Shah Jahan, an avid hunter whose abilities called to the mind of Mughal artists and painters alike the skills of both the *Shāh-nāmah*'s Khusrau and the Sasanian king Bahram Gur, the latter of whom was famed as a fierce hunter and further immortalized in Nizami-ye Ganjavi's twelfth-century romance, the *Haft Paikar* or Seven Beauties part of the poet's famed *Khamsah* (quintet) cycle.[53] A young Akbar himself appears in the guise of Bahram Gur in a painting we find in an early Mughal *Khamsah*.[54]

The self-conscious choices on the part of the emperor Akbar to encourage Iranians to make India their second home and to ensure that Persian became the official language of government, moreover—choices that saw both the arrival of numerous Iranian émigrés to the Mughal court and the production of hundreds of manuscripts in Persian within its atelier thus greatly outnumbering those produced in Iran itself—also strongly contributed to this Mughal identification with the *Shāh-nāmah* and Persianite culture (which some scholars often note—erroneously—was rescued from obscurity in the third/tenth century by the epic's author), and was a factor in the Indo-Timurid veneration of the poet Ferdausi.[55] This regard resounds within Abu'l

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Faizi 'Allami's versified response to the emperor Akbar's query regarding the best of poets as we find it in the *Akbar-nāmah*, a Persian *kavi-prāśaṃsā* or "ode to poets":

همه بمشهد جان حاضر و بتن غایب همه بذات خدا باقي و ز خود فاني
علی الخصوص سخن آفرین خطّهٔ طوس که در ریاض سخن بوده پیر دهقاني
قیاس کار ز شهنامه اش بگیر که نیست بزور بازوی او رستم سجستاني
درو جز این نتوان یافت هیچ نقص که بود بروزگار غلامسان نوج ساماني
اگر بدور شهنشاه نکته دان بودی به تیرگي نشدی روز او شبستاني[56]

All [of these poets] are present through the witnessing of their souls although their bodies are concealed.

All [of these poets] remain (*bāqī*) within the divine essence although their selves have been annihilated (*fānī*).

Especially [revered among them] is the most eloquent writer of Tus [Ferdausi] who was the pir of the *dehaqān* of the garden of speech.[57]

Judge his deeds from his Book of Kings. The strength of his arm outstrips that of Rostam of Sijistan [himself].

Apart from this [lofty reputation] he was unable to reap a harvest, it was a loss as he lived during the period of the Samanids.

If he had lived during the time of the emperor [Akbar] who appreciates subtleties his days would not have been dark nights.

Such praise underscores both Akbar's generous patronage of poets and their arts and as well Akbar's fondness for the *Shāh-nāmah*, which is further implied in the fact that both Badauni and Abu'l Fazl, the latter in his description of Iranian poets at the Mughal court, tell us that Akbar, to whom the *Shāh-nāmah* was often recited, ordered Mulla Taqi Muhammad (also known as Mulla Naqib of Shabistar, Iran) to translate Ferdausi's opus into prose.[58] To this we may add the fact that Abu'l Fazl exhorted 'Abdu'rrahim Khan-i Khanan to read the *Shāh-nāmah* (as well as the Timurid *Ẓafar-nāmah* of Sharafuddin 'Ali Yazdi and the Mughal atelier's own *Chinghīz-nāmah*) as he embarked upon the drive to take Qandahar in the 1590s.[59] This affection for the epic was likewise made quite explicit in Akbar's shining new capital itself, Fatehpur Sikri. The building (*kothī*) believed to have been allocated to Akbar's Rajput wife, Maryamuzzamani (d. 1622/3), the mother of Jahangir, was initially known as the *Sunahrā Makān* or Golden House because of both its gilding and the many frescoes that adorned its walls. These frescoes,

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although covered with varnish and thus in the decrepit state we today observe by the early twentieth century when Ernest Havell's travelogue was first published, depicted scenes from both Hindu mythology and Ferdausi's epic.[60] In the light of the emphasis on martial vigor in Rajput mythology, the presence of battle-scene images from the *Shāh-nāmah* in the Rajput queen's building should come as no surprise.

It was this keen Mughal attention to the *Shāh-nāmah*, as well as the respectful attitude of the emperor Akbar, which most likely prompted Akbar's contemporary Muhammad Qasim Ferishtah (c. 1560–1611 CE) down in the kingdom of Bijapur to have the Persian epic's beloved characters intermingle with the heroes of the Mahabharata in his *Gulshān-i Ibrahimī* (also known as the *Tarīkh-i Ferishtah*), written under the auspices of the famed Ibrahim 'Adil Shah (1580–1627 CE).[61] Moreover, when 'Ali Ibrahim Khan (d. 1793 CE), whose career flourished as an intelligence gatherer for the British East India Company, was attempting to trace the royal genealogy of the Maratha House of Shivaji Bhonsale, the tale he recounts in the later eighteenth century (a fictitious one to be sure) finds Shivaji's forebears originally situated in Iran in the person of the last Zoroastrian king of the *Shāh-nāmah*, the very wise Naushirvan (i.e., Anushirvan the Just, 501–79 CE), whose descendants were scattered "at the time when the holy warriors of the army of Islam subverted the realms of Iran."[62]

These regular references and allusions to Ferdausi's epic touchstone, even by non-Muslim houses in India, is despite the fact that the Mughal atelier itself did not produce illustrated copies of the *Shāh-nāmah* (save the no-longer-extant manuscript prepared under the auspices of the famed 'Abdu'rrahim Khan-i Khanan).[63] The Mughal *kitāb-khānah* nevertheless benefited from the presence of a very famous and exquisite copy of the text produced by Timur's grandson, Muhammad Juki, which was originally owned by Babur whose seal is easily discernible on the fly-leaf of the manuscript.[64] The tenth Guru, it thus appears, chose his template very wisely. He was, moreover, by no means the first to make use of the *Shāh-nāmah* as a guide for his concerns. Numerous writers of versed histories as far west as Turkey and within India, Iran, Central Asia, and Transoxiana dating from as early as the eleventh century likewise modeled their texts on Ferdausi's grand epic,[65] becoming the imitators (*muqallidān*) of Ferdausi as claimed by the late Persianist Manuchehr Murtazavi.[66] The words of Thomas Lentz and Glen Lowry below, although specific to Timurid Iran and Central Asia, nevertheless capture the situation within India itself:

> In the Persianate tradition the *Shahnama* [*sic*] was viewed as more than literature. It was also a political treatise, as it addressed deeply

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rooted conceptions of honor, morality, and legitimacy. Illustrated versions of it were considered desirable as expressions of the aspirations and politics of ruling elites in the Iranian world.[67]

One such text, completed in the fourteenth century, bears mentioning in passing in this regard. Interestingly, this work is also titled the *Ẓafar-nāmah* and was written as a *maṡnavī* in the *mutāqarib* meter following Ferdausi's text. Known as the *Ẓafar-nāmah-'i Hamdallāh Mustaufī* of the Ilkhanid historian Hamdallah Mustaufi of Qazin (approx. AH 680–744 /1281–1344 CE), the work deals with the history of Islam, of the Mongols, and of Iran, continuing Ferdausi's chronology to a later period (his own up until 1335 CE) while including within his text a substantial number of Ferdausi's own couplets. Such chronological continuation was a common facet of texts modelled on the *Shāh-nāmah* like the *Khamsah* of 'Abdullah Hatifi of Herat (d. 1521) within which we find the *Tīmur-nāmah* that narrates the exploits of Amir Timur in a clearly *Shāh-nāmah*-esque style (Amir Timur was the ancestor of Hatifi's ruler and patron Sultan Husain Bayqara, the cousin of Babur) as well as the history of the Mongols prepared by Ahmad Tabrizi in 1337–38 known as the *Changīz-nāmah*.[68] As far as I can tell, none of these "imitations" has any bearing whatsoever on the tenth Guru's letter.[69] Nor too does another, also of the fourteenth-century, the *Futūḥ al-Salāṭīn* (Conquests of the Sultans). Written in India by Abu'l Malik whose *takhalluṣ* was 'Isami (d. 1350), this was a text well known to and utilized by later Mughal chroniclers.[70]

The Sikh *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s clear reference to Ferdausi by name occurs in *bait* 80, the second *meṣra'* of which paraphrases one of the most ethically pregnant scenes of the *Shāh-nāmah*, the capture and execution of the innocent son of the unstable king of Iran Kai Kavus, Seyavash, at the hands of Afrasiyab, the enemy of Iran and the ruler of Turan. Particularly forceful is this reference as there is no chapter within the *Shāh-nāmah* that so extols the virtue of staying true to one's oath and the tragic consequences that may result from so doing, a theme that resonates throughout the tenth Guru's epistle and apparently provides its raison d'être. Compare:

Shāh-nāmah	*Ẓafar-nāmah*
شتاب و بدی کار اهرمنست	چه خوش گفت فردوسی خوش زبان
پشیمانی و رنج جان و تنست[72]	شتابی بود کار اهرمنان[71]

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How beautifully the sweet-tongued Ferdausi has said, "Hasty action is the handiwork of devils."

Hastiness and evil are the work of Ahriman, the devil. These lead to deep remorse and physical pain.

Melikian-Chirvani has recently unpacked a useful, sympathetic subtext of the *Shāh-nāmah* passage above in relation to the Guru's epistle which may be summarized here. He notes that the words within the *Shāh-nāmah's bait* are spoken by the wise Pilsom (the brother of Piran, the latter of whom is to Afrasiyab and Turan what Rostam is to Kavus and Iran, the wise and loyal champion) just after Afrasiyab has ordered the execution of Seyavash. Afrasiyab was prior to this point on very good terms with Seyavash. The Iranian prince had abandoned Iran and his own father, Kavus, to ensure that neither of them would break their word: Kavus to follow the etiquette of war and Seyavash to honor his pledge to Afrasiyab that Turanian hostages would not be executed.[73] Cognizant of the genuine integrity of the prince, Afrasiyab begins to treat Seyavash as his own son and gives to him his own daughter as wife, Farigis, as well as territory within Turan to build his own city, Seyavashgard. But the venomous jealousy and malignant lies about Seyavash that Garsivas weaves around his brother are enough to entrap the latter in a web of deceit despite what Afrasiyab's own eyes tell him.[74] It is perhaps because of his feelings for Seyavash that Afrasiyab does initially consider Pilsom's counsel and airs a number of misgivings (Seyavash after all is the son of Kavus and perhaps more importantly has been raised by Rostam—another surrogate father of sorts—whose anger at the murder of the innocent will be terrifying to behold).[75] But such caution he ultimately rejects out of the fear, insecurity, and the anger stoked by Garsivas who, let us recall, had been previously defeated by Seyavash and who had to bear the further humiliation of watching Seyavash demonstrate his prowess during his embassy to Seyavashgard. For Melikian-Chirvani, Afrasiyab's recognition of the injustice of his decision and its eventual execution, in the end, lays blame for the murder of the Iranian prince upon Afrasiyab's advisors and brother rather than with the king himself. "The implicit suggestion [of *Ẓafar-nāmah* 80]," Melikian-Chirvani claims, "is that ʿĀlamgīr, like Afrāsiyāb, while committing a crime was also the victim of his bad entourage and fate"—the crime in this case being presumably the violation of the Quranic oath of safe passage. This is an interpretation he further supports by referring to *Ẓafar-nāmah* 14 regarding the role played

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by both Aurangzeb's bakhshi and divan in the siege of Anandpur (to which we shall return).[76]

On whom blame for the evil deed lies is, of course, questionable as ultimately it is not Garsivas but Afrasiyab who gives the command to kill Seyavash. At best, Afrasiyab is in this reading an impotent king and a conflicted surrogate father (and so like the father of Seyavash, who also plays his part in the prince's execution), and thus well situated within the *Shāh-nāmah*, which does narrate the lives of many such kings (Goshtasp, Zal, and Rostam for instance). Such claims notwithstanding, I would like to suggest that there is far more than the Melikian-Chirvani subtext implied within *Ẓafar-nāmah* 80. Indeed, the impact of this *bait* was most likely intended to be far more extreme, as the tragedy of Seyavash is not the only heartrending *Shāh-nāmah* allusion within this single couplet. Rather, within it we discover a dense intertextuality and a powerful ambiguity known in Persian poetics as *īhām* (lit., "deceiving") and in Sanskrit as *śleṣa* (lit., "embrace").

Let us keep in mind that *bait* 80 appears immediately after the two couplets that Sikh tradition adamantly claims make reference to the executions and deaths of the tenth Guru's four sons as well as to the members of his Khalsa at Chamkaur, making clear that the hastiness (*shitābī*) mentioned in *Ẓafar-nāmah* 80 (an impetuousness that is often criticized within the *Shāh-nāmah*)[77] is understood to refer to Aurangzeb's rash decision to violate his pledge of safe passage, his Quranic oath, on the skewed advice of his representatives. This hastiness is, however, implied to be part of a total breakdown, hints of which permeate the previous two *baits* specifically and all that has come before these two generally. For this reason, we shall continue with *bait* 80 (the stage for which the previous four *baits* prepare) in just a moment as we note that together *Ẓafar-nāmah* 78–79 raise the issue of Mughal manliness and its attendant themes, which will form a preface for the ultimate story of Seyavash and which further informs an important implication throughout the Guru's epistle.

چها شد که چون بچگان کشته چار که باقی بماند است پیچیده مار
چه مردی که اخگر خموشان کنی که آتش دمان را دوران کنی[78]

What does it matter that you have killed four children when the coiled snake still lives? You have put out a few sparks. Is this manliness (*mardī*)? The circling fire still rages.

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As we can easily perceive, the fact that Guru Gobind Singh escaped Aurangzeb's clutches (of which the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was no doubt a pointed reminder) and the belief that Aurangzeb's decision to violate his pledge subsequently precipitated the execution of the Guru's children allows the tenth Guru to call into question Aurangzeb's *mardī*, his manliness, and by extension that *mardī* with which all Mughal imperial servants and warriors were generally associated in Indo-Timurid northern India. For if Aurangzeb lacks *mardī*, the Mughal model of which is presented in a series of texts generally known as *akẖlāqī* (dispositional digests)—the most popular of which was the *Akẖlāq-i Naṣirī* of Nasiruddin Tusi (d. 1274 CE)[79]—a paradigm also regularly articulated within the *Akbar-nāmah*, he is not, in the words of Rosalind O'Hanlon, the "master of his extraordinary bodily powers," and thus fails in his role as Mughal exemplar par excellence, the ideal of masculine virtue and of male bodily and moral comportment to which all Mughals, imperial servants and warriors alike, aspired and in whose service all such men could become perfected.[80] The tenth Guru is forced to indirectly prompt Aurangzeb to embody manliness in the set of *baits* previous to these two by imploring him to uphold his oaths (and rectify his previous dishonor) and to thus act wisely, a facet of manliness within the *Shāh-nāmah*, a characteristic emphasized particularly in the figure of Seyavash whose story seems to hold such poignancy for the tenth Guru:[81]

که بر سر ترا قرض قسم قران به گفته شما کار خوبی رسان
بباید تو دانش پرستی کنی بکار شما چیره دستی کنی[82]

On your head is the burden of [your] Quranic oath. Perfectly follow through on your earlier statement by acting deftly with knowledge and wisdom.

Such reminders of course imply that Aurangzeb has yet to act wisely (i.e., has acted unwisely so far) thus allowing the reader to infer that the human perfectibility through imperial service that was the hallmark of Mughal ideology is equally threatened as the one who is the object of this service is obviously corrupt and unthinking. Aurangzeb's loss of control that results in his clearly deficient *mardī* and his lack of wisdom therefore suggests that he is no longer the model of manly integrity in control of his own body and thus by extension his own household and his own kingdom, all three domains of which are homologous in Tusi's ethical guide.[83]

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Such deficiency also suggests that the emperor fails in his duty as symbolic father to his household and to his imperial servants, most particularly the *khānah-zād* or long-standing and devoted "houseborn" servants, the most dedicated of whom were titled *farzand* or child.[84] The term *bachchagān* (children) followed by *mardī* in *Ẓafar-nāmah* 78–79 (not a perfect aesthetic balance or *tanāsub*[harmony of images] to be sure—for this *pedarānah, pedarī*, or *pedarāngī*, "fatherliness," would perhaps have been more sufficient—but aesthetically balanced nevertheless in sequence and as far as both *akhlāqī* and the legend of Seyavash are concerned) seems to contribute just such a texture to the epistle, adding a further layer of cruelty by perhaps alluding to the emperor's troubled past with his own children. Neither men nor fathers should kill children, their own or others. There is here a hint of *Ẓafar-nāmah* 80 to come, for in *Ẓafar-nāmah* 79 we are able to recognize an allusion that primes us for both future allusions to the *Shāh-nāmah*[85] and particularly to the reference to Seyavash: although killed under the orders of Afrasiyab—interestingly a second surrogate father to the prince (Seyavash himself is referred to as *farzand* by Afrasiyab)[86]—the prince was indirectly killed by his actual father Kavus who was also partly responsible for the death of another famous young man in the *Shāh-nāmah*, Sohrab, Rostam's son, by refusing to give to Rostam the *nūshdārū*, the medicine that would have cured the fallen warrior of Turan. It was Kavus who forced Seyavash to abandon Iran for Turan.[87] The implications here seem quite straightforward: if the emperor continues to follow his present ignominious course the empire itself, of which he is deemed the exemplary ruler and courtier endowed with the divine authority of fatherhood, is threatened with similar corruptibility, with emasculation and ultimate dissolution, a conclusion that we shall see also lies at the heart of Aurangzeb's inability to adhere to his Quranic oath. It is important to here recall that this inability to hold true to one's word is a failure that, for Ferdausi, also negates *mardī* as Rostam notes in his letter to the king of Hamaveran, who had promised safe passage to Kai Kavus as a ruse to entrap the king (intriguingly symmetrical to the situation which prompted the *Ẓafar-nāmah* in the first place):

که بر شاه ایران کمین ساختی به پیوستگی در بد انداختی
نه مردی بود چاره جستن بجنگ نرفتن برسم دلاور نهنگ[88]

You have ambushed the Shah of Iran and have cast away your oath. It is not the way of manliness to employ such knavish tricks while running to war; nor do you go [to battle] in the manner of the bold crocodile....

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Such analogous violations on Aurangzeb's part are indicative of the decay engendered by similarly un-*mardī*-like deeds on the part of the kings of Iran such as Zahhak, the entrapped-and-later-released Kavus, and Goshtasp (Esfandyar's father) among others.[89] Put simply, how can one expect the emperor to control his empire and lead by example when he cannot even control his own body, often equated with the kingdom itself?[90]

This lack of control, then, forms the premise of *bait* 80 as the *shitābī* of the second *meṣra'* is very much a symptom of the emperor's loss of direction. The first *meṣra'* continues the theme of the innocent killed, which we see in *bait*s 78–9 (a subject that the Seyavash reference a *meṣra'* later concludes) in a creatively intertextual way, as it also alludes quite transparently to the relatively well-known passage from the fairly brief twenty-ninth tale within the *bāb dovam* of Shaikh Sa'di's *Būstān* (distinguished as it finds mention within the memoirs of the emperor Jahangir).[91] Sa'di's allusion is in turn an unmistakable reference to another passage within the *Shāh-nāmah* thematically linked by Ferdausi to the story of Seyavash. First, however, we find this set of *bait*s in Sa'di's story of the ant and Shibli (the Sufi friend of the very famous ecstatic martyr Mansuralhallaj), dealing with beneficence (*iḥsān*) and the sheer joy of being alive:

چه خوش گفت فردوسی پاکزاد که رحمت بر آن تربت پاک باد
میازار موری که دانه کش است که جان دارد و جان شیرین خوش است[92]

How sweetly has Ferdausi of pure lineage[93] spoken (blessings upon that pure dust which covers him!): "Do not trouble an ant which is dragging along a grain as even the ant is alive, and life is sweet."

Sa'di is here quoting from one of the earliest tragic episodes within Ferdausi's grand epic, the despicable murder of Iraj by his brothers Salm and Tur, another example of extreme violence perpetrated upon the pure and the genuine.[94] Iraj, who rules Iran, selflessly says the words quoted within the second of Sa'di's *bait*s immediately above just as he is about to be killed by the elder sons of his father, Faridun, as a consequence of their greed, haste, and desire for power.[95] The *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s double allusion within the first *meṣra'* of *bait* 80 is not coincidental as Sa'di's principal story here is that of a man, Shibli, restless and worried that he has displaced what to him is inevitably the most humble of creatures, which can cause him no harm whatsoever, the ant, from its rightful and legitimate place, "its rightful refuge" (*mā'vā-ye khud*; *jā-ye khwesh*), in this case Shibli's sack of wheat grain.[96] Not only has Aurangzeb apparently

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taken just this action against the Guru, who is likewise innocent and humble, forcefully dislocating him and his Sikhs from Anandpur, the Guru's patrimony, but he has also inflicted a terrible violence upon the tenth Master and his blameless family. The first *meṣra'* of *bait* 80 thus raises the erudite reader's expectations that the next hemistich will specifically follow Sa'di's and refer to the murder of Iraj, but these prospects are thwarted (perhaps emphasizing the Guru's own frustration) when the more gripping tragedy of Seyavash is recounted, a more compelling calamity in this particular case as it is far more commensurate with the Guru's own predicament: like the Seyavash episode, but unlike that of Iraj, the Guru's innocent sons have not been killed by brotherly and kingly rivals, but rather by a virtual Afrasiyab (that is, Aurangzeb), the tyrant who is often claimed to be the servant of Ahriman, the dark force in Zoroastrian mythology. It is likely as well that Guru Gobind Singh chose to allude to the Seyavash story as he most likely saw in the Iranian prince a kindred spirit in that Seyavash, like the tenth Guru, was guided predominantly by his inward religious principles, by his commitment to truth; rather than demonstrate his allegiance to Iran or his filial loyalties, he became a champion of truth as he understood it and thus the protégé of Afrasiyab. And so too was the Guru guided, who took the emperor's Qur'an-sworn oath to heart, a point he reiterates throughout the epistle. One may recall that just a few *baits* prior to the clear Seyavash allusion, *bait* 71 specifically, Guru Gobind Singh points out that his God is *sachā'ī pādiṯẖāh*, the True King who is the king of truth; a commitment to truth thus effortlessly translates into allegiance to the divine:

که او بی محاب است شهان شاه زمین و زمان سچائی پادشاه[97]

He is the king of kings, fearless, and the true king of both the firmament and the heavens.

The foiled expectations of *Ẓafar-nāmah* 80 are thus a part of the interplay between the intertextual resonances of this *bait* and the previous ones mentioned that heighten the tragedy of the Guru and the wickedness of the emperor, giving them meaning, substance, and viscosity. It is likely as well that the first *meṣra'* of *bait* 80 also reflects back upon the tenth Guru's own ability, like that of Ferdausi, to speak softly, a tranquility that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* makes manifest (as we shall see in *bait* 22 for example). There is a further identification with the doomed Iranian prince Seyavash here in the sense that both the tenth Guru and Kavus's son initially accepted the guarantees offered by their

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respective antagonists, the kings of Turan and India, and paid a terrible price for the latter's subsequent violations.[98] This connection may be what the tenth Guru is attempting to further draw out indirectly in *bait* 79, thus setting the stage ever more brightly as it were for the reference to Seyavash in *bait* 80: Guru Gobind Singh and the Sikhs have inherited the very fire through which Seyavash had passed in an earlier episode in his tragic story: they are the circling flames through which the pure prince had to pass to test his fidelity to his word and the truth.[99] And this is a fire, it is implied, through which both Aurangzeb and his empire will be unable to pass unharmed, corrupt and blackened as they are. Perhaps here is also implied a further connection to the fire's light of *Ẓafar-nāmah* 79, which promises to eliminate the darkness that is Aurangzeb/Ahriman of *bait* 80, another *tanāsub*. We may extrapolate that it is this light that glows of *farr*, the glorious light of rule that *bait* 79 may suggest now shines within the Guru and his Sikhs.

The simultaneous and overlapping allusions to the moral in the *Būstān*'s Tale 29 and to both the interlinked tragedies of Iraj and Seyavash also accentuate those sentiments that very much occupy the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, particularly its last quarter or so, just after *bait* 80:[100] be mindful of violating your word and inflicting violence upon the guiltless for the Lord protects the innocent and is himself far more powerful than even the most preeminent person, and as such will ultimately visit upon you this same kind of justice. And so Sa'di's moral (which appears one *bait* after the Shibli passage),

مزن بر سر ناتوان دست زور که روزی به پایش در افتی چو مور[101]

Do not strike the hand of violence upon a helpless head for one day you shall fall like an ant at the feet of such violence.

is seconded by Guru Gobind Singh in a suitably *Shāh-nāmah*-esque style,

مزن تیغ بر خون کس بی دریغ ترا نیز خون چرخ ریزد به تیغ[102]

With impunity you stain your sword with human blood but the sword of the heavenly sphere will ultimately strike you down likewise.

and

تو گر جبر عاجز خراشی مکن قسم را به تیشه تراشی مکن[103]

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> Do not use your strength to harm the helpless and do not hack away at your oaths.

And such statements in turn reflect back upon Pilsom's claim that haste and rash judgment (as that displayed by Aurangzeb) inevitably lead to pain and remorse. Later Sikh tradition will most certainly pick up this thread and loudly evoke its sentiment in the destruction of Aurangzeb.

Here, therefore, we may further underscore and even augment Christopher Shackle's implied claim that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is unique in the history of the Persian literature of India.[104] It may well be matchless in the history of Persian literature throughout the entire Islamicate. We have already noted that there were numerous imitations of the *Sh̲āh-nāmah* throughout the Persianite Islamicate from the eleventh century onward. A survey of all of such imitations suggests that there were a number of ways that poets both received and patterned their works after the Iranian epic, modelings that are noted with minor variations by both Manuchehr Murtazavi and Sunil Sharma, and implied in Jan Rypka's *History of Iranian Literature*:

> در هر حال مقلدان شاهنامه را می توان به سه گروه تقسیم کرد[105]

> One is in any case able to divide the imitators of the *Sh̲āh-nāmah* into three groups,

says Murtazavi. First, poets who focused upon material not covered within the original text, in many cases advancing the *Sh̲āh-nāmah* narrative to include their own and their patron's times (for example, Mustaufi's aforementioned *Ẓafar-nāmah*), a pattern, Rypka notes, that Ferdausi himself encouraged in regard to Iran's history;[106] second, authors who eulogized their patrons in the hope of monetary gain (*pādash̲ī*) by versifying their history in *Sh̲āh-nāmah*-esque fashion, in some instances transforming their patrons or their patrons' ancestors into heroes themselves—here we may note both the *Gh̲āzān-nāmah* of Nuruddin bin Shamsuddin Muhammad written in 1361–62 CE in honor of Mahmud Ghazan (1271–1304 CE) the Ilkhanid ruler as well as the Ottoman *Ḥünkār-nāme*, which advanced the epic to 1473 to incorporate the narrative of the Ottoman ruler, Mehmed II (1451–81).[107] And finally there is a third group, those poets who focused upon characters who

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have minor roles within Ferdausi's text, converting these individuals into the principal subjects of their own epics such as Asadi's *Garshasp-nāmah* completed in the eleventh century.[108] The *Ẓafar-nāmah* of Guru Gobind Singh certainly shares some features of each of these three clusters but nevertheless fits none of these categories adequately and thus requires us to propose an altogether new classification: an imitation (in Murtazavi's sense) whose primary purpose was to point out the severe moral limitations of the present ruler, critically comparing and contrasting such a ruler with figures from the *Shāh-nāmah*, both noble and base, in the hope, one gathers, of effecting a change on the ruler's or recipient's part. Of course what sets the *Ẓafar-nāmah* of the tenth Guru apart even further from the three categories noted above (notwithstanding the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s obvious profoundly shorter length) is that this text is traditionally understood to be an epistle rather than a history or panegyric proper.

Certainly, the themes we excavated surrounding *bait* 80 resound throughout both the *Ẓafar-nāmah* and the *Shāh-nāmah*. But the couplet of the tenth Guru's epistle today considered the most famous refers not to the *Shāh-nāmah*. In fact, it alludes to a *bait* we find precisely repeated within two of the most important texts of the Mughal moral universe, the aforementioned *Būstān* of Sa'di and the same author's Rose Garden, the *Gulistān*.[109] This *bait* is of course *Ẓafar-nāmah* 22, appearing in both the nineteenth story of the Orchard (the first portion of which deals, not surprisingly, with how to treat a tyrant who strikes fear in the hearts of the pure, the *pākān*) and as the eighth admonition (*pand*) of the *Gulistān*, both texts with which Aurangzeb and his courtiers, as well as the women of the royal family,[110] were undoubtedly familiar:[111]

Ẓafar-nāmah	*Gulistān/Būstān*
چو کار از همه حیلتی در گذشت	چو دست از همه حیلتی در گسست
حلال است بردن بشمشیر دست[112]	حلال است بردن بشمشیر دست[113]
When all strategies brought to bear are exhausted it is then lawful to take steel in hand.	When the hand is foiled at every turn it is then permitted to draw the sword.

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As mentioned earlier, for Sikhs today the entire text of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* has been effectively collapsed into this single *bait*, which provides sanction for earlier Sikh ideas of *mīrī-pīrī* (secular and spiritual sovereignty) and righteous battle (*dharam yuddh*). This contemporary hegemonic understanding may be credited in large part to the Sikh intellectuals of the late nineteenth-century Singh Sabha reform movement who appropriated the couplet and attuned it to resonate at their modernist and colonial frequency. By "modernist and colonial" what I mean to emphasize is an epistemological and political environment, largely (though by no means completely) Orientalist and essentialist in nature, in which identifiable groups (or better, groups made to be rigidly identifiable) within the British Punjab competed among one another for resources and privilege.[114] The Singh Sabha reading of *bait* 22 (and thus of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* proper) as a premise for future Sikh action rather than a justification for past ones, is in this light a facet of what Doris Jakobsh calls the "politics of similarity" and Tony Ballantyne refers to as "points of recognition," namely those mores, ideals, and values that both Sikhs and Britons believed they held in common: in this case, the vigor and "manliness" tempered by caution, rationality, and the rule of law in deciding to finally resort to armed struggle (more as an ideal of course in both cases as both British and Sikh histories make abundantly clear).[115] It is most likely that the Singh Sabha also read *bait* 22 in this manner as it tended to distance the Sikhs from both their Punjabi Muslim Others (who were constructed as venal and violent, often drawing the sword out of its scabbard with impunity) as well as their Hindu counterparts (who were portrayed as weak and effeminate, far too timid to ever draw weapons). As Ballantyne tells us, these "points of recognition" rested on the "identification and marginalization of other groups that lacked those qualities that the Sikhs and Britons supposedly shared."[116]

As a result, *bait* 22 often becomes the pitch to which the entire *Ẓafar-nāmah* is adjusted.[117] This is the modern understanding that is inscribed into the Punjab's very landscape through the situation of the two aforementioned gurdwaras in the villages of Dina and Kangar along Guru Gobind Singh Marg.[118] It is exactly this *bait* that is celebrated upon the nearby *dasmeś laṭṭhān* in Dina, one of the twenty landmarks which today mark Guru Gobind Singh's 577 kilometer trail, and as well upon the village gate as one drives the five kilometer distance to nearby Kangar where we find another gurdwara associated with the Epistle of Victory (figure 3.1).[119]

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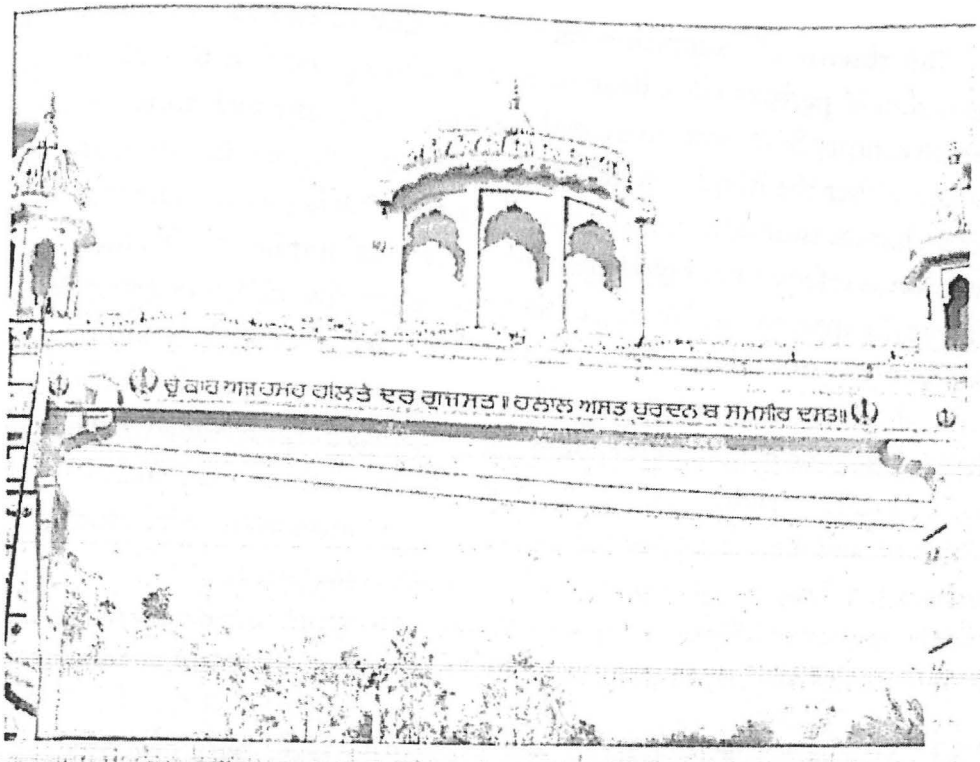

FIGURE 3.1. The village gate as one enters/leaves Dina. The inscription is *Ẓafar-nāmah* 22. Photo by author, December 2010.

To be sure, *Ẓafar-nāmah* 22 is a very important *bait* which, too, like *bait* 80 is thickly intertextual and as such deserves very much to be singled out. The particular focus upon it in modern Sikh literature though is far too sharp and fails to accommodate its very significant periphery which, regrettably, continues to remain blurry. This is in part an unfortunate consequence of the aforementioned Singh Sabha understanding of the epistle as it veers attention away from one of the letter's major reference points (perhaps the principal point), the *Shāh-nāmah*, a fact upon which we have already touched and one to which we will most certainly return.

During the eighteenth century, this focus was mostly absent as Sikhs of this period by contrast did not seem to give any preference to this *bait* at all nor to any extracanonical interpretations of it, let alone casting it as the epistle's guiding principal. *Ẓafar-nāmā Saṭīk* manuscripts of this period provide quite straightforward translations of this passage without any further elaboration and without mentioning its earlier incarnations within either the *Gulistān* or the *Būstān*, essential in more comprehensively working through the robust texture of the couplet itself and its relation to the *Ẓafar-nāmah* as a whole.[110]

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This absence of a supplementary explanation to *bait* 22 in commentarial texts should perhaps elicit little surprise as during the first half of the eighteenth century Sikhs were in no real position to take any such concrete action against either the Mughal state or its Iranian and Afghan invaders, as a desperate last measure or not, as the later devastation of large numbers of Sikhs in two events referred to as *ghallūgāre* or "massacres" implies.[121] This inability is despite the apparent declaration of Sikh sovereignty by the Sikh warrior Banda Bahadar (d. 1715), whose written commands commence with "year one" and onto whose coins is cast a strictly Sikh message of sovereign rule, though one deriving from no contemporary Sikh text.[122] Things did alter somewhat during the mid-to-later eighteenth century with the formation of the independent Sikh *misls* and their more powerful and relatively autonomous Sikh chieftains, men such as Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, or Alha Singh of Patiala, the sovereign nature of whose courts was quite nuanced, attempting at times to act on the one hand according to the contingency of the moment and, on the other, within the rubric of conduct articulated within the Khalsa *rahit-nāmās*.[123] Based on orthographic styles of the texts that I have seen it is most likely that *Zafar-nāmā Saṭīk* manuscripts began to make their appearance sometime during this period to be interpreted for scattered sangats by Sikh *kathākars*, *giānīs*, *bhaṭṭs*, and wandering *ḍhāḍhī* minstrels among other "traditional intellectuals." This would accord well with eighteenth-century interest in the Dasam Granth as a whole since, Robin Rhinehart tells us, "it addresses concerns of worldly leadership throughout."[124] Yet interest in *bait* 22 is to the best of my knowledge simply not there, even in this turbulent period.

Certainly the *misldars* and other Sikhs knew of the epistle and thus of the *bait* and most likely did not reject the text of the *bait* as "totally opposed to the standard 'sword-ideology' of the Guru" (*ih chhand gurū sāhib dī sikkeband kaṛag dī vichārdhārā de kataī virudh hai*), in the words of Gurcharan Singh Sahinsara, principles that are apparently found in other Dasam Granth texts,[125] but rather revered the text both as the composition of Guru Gobind Singh and as a tentative guide on how righteous rulers were to ideally conduct themselves. As we noted, manuscript copies of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* dating from this period are commonplace as are those of the Dasam Granth and individual compositions within the tenth Guru's text. One would also think that as these *misls* and the Khalsa *rahit-nāmās* of their period urged Sikh unity and cohesion to further a "belief in the common goal of establishing Sikh sovereignty,"[126] the subtext of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* (of which more later) would have been in their interests to promote, and *bait* 22 would have been appropriated perhaps to justify any form of *misl*-against-*misl* aggression of which there was

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a great deal or to play down the fact that *misldar*s did in fact reject overtures to cease hostilities in what appears to be a clear violation of the very spirit of *bait* 22.[127] Such contraventions of what may even at this early date have been seen as Khalsa Sikh practice seemed commonplace in the eighteenth century, however, for the reasons Purnima Dhavan notes below:

> The pragmatic demands of political alliances, campaigns, kinship loyalty, and their own unique circumstances constantly forced Khalsa Sikhs to reconcile, interrogate, and at times willfully ignore what it meant to be a Khalsa Sikh in these times.[128]

Once again, the sheer number of *Ẓafar-nāmah* manuscripts may suggest that *misldar*s were aware of the Guru's advice. Certainly, justification for aggression such as that offered by *bait* 22 would have served the welfare of *misldar*s whose relationships with the declining Mughal state and subsequently the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali were very much conflicted ones and as well bolstered attempts by certain Sikh leaders to engage (and thus profit from) the newly emerging British East India Company, whose view of the Sikhs tended to mirror those skewed ones we discover within earlier Mughal Persian chronicles.[129]

We do find such texts of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* appearing during Ranjit Singh's rule as well, but even during this period, apart from the one *sākhī* of the *Gurū kīān Sākhīān*, to which we shall return, there is no singular attention paid to this *bait*. During this period it would have been a rather easy matter to appropriate this *bait* in order to justify the Lahore Darbar's own use of violence and punitive justice, and allow Ranjit Singh to further symbolically associate himself with Guru Gobind Singh clearly. After all, this would have proved a rather small step from the Punjab monarch's self-identification with the martial order that the tenth Guru had founded, the Khalsa, in whose name the maharaja ruled as made clear throughout the documents of his court, a clarity also cast onto the very coins of his empire.[130]

This is not to say that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* had simply been ignored. Not only shall we see the vigorous historiography surrounding the delivery of the text to the emperor (its "journey-narrative") in the *gur-bilās* and *bańsāvalī* literature, but nineteenth-century Khalsa Sikh sources, Punjabi and Persian alike, do more than just name the text by actually referencing passages from the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, in some cases inserting them verbatim within their narratives. In only one instance does the focus incorporate *bait* 22 in its attempt to justify the use of weapons, and this in a text not generally associated with the Lahore

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Darbar, the *Gurū kiān Sākhīān* of Swarup Singh Kaushish, who was likely a brahman Sikh and who is said to have collected his *sākhīs* sometime during the last decade of the eighteenth century just as the Shukerchakia *misl* and Ranjit Singh were rising to power.[131]

Within the 106th *sākhī* of this text, we encounter Guru Gobind Singh in southern India. At this time, he came across the *ḍerā* of a Dadu panthi mahant named Jait Ram who queried the Sikh Master regarding the Sikh turn to martial ways, asking him to justify this apparent transformation in the light of Guru Nanak's earlier stance by referencing a shabad of Dadu in a *sākhī* whose story line is suggestive of Bhai Gurdas's famous justification of Guru Hargobind's more enthusiastic exploits. Let us pick up the story from here:

> ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਬਾਵਾ ਦਾਦੂ ਰਾਮ ਕਾ ਕਹਾ ਦੋਹਾ ਜੈਤ ਰਾਮ ਸੇ ਸੁਨ ਕੇ ਬੜੇ ਮੁਸਕਰਾਏ। ਬਚਨ ਹੋਆ ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਤੁਸਾਂ ਠੀਕ ਤੇ ਯਥਾਰਥ ਕਹਿਆ ਹੈ। ਦੇਖੀਏ ਪੰਚਮ ਗੁਰੂ ਅਰਜਨ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਨੇ ਲਵਪੁਰੀ ਰਹਿ ਕੇ ਬੜਾ ਕਸ਼ਟ ਉਠਾਇਆ ਆਖਰ ਸ਼ਹਾਦਤ ਪਾਈ। ਛੈਮੇਂ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਾਂ ਸਾਲਾਂ ਬੱਧੀ ਗੜ੍ਹ ਗੁਆਲੀਅਰ ਮੇਂ ਨਜ਼ਰਬੰਦ ਰਹਿ ਕੇ ਬੜਾ ਦੁਖ ਉਠਾਇਆ। ਅਸਾਂ ਕੇ ਪਿਤਾ ਨਾਵੇਂ ਗੁਰ ਜੀ ਦਿਲੀ ਜਾਇ ਕੇ ਅਸਹਿ ਤੇ ਅਕਹਿ ਕੇਸ਼ਟ ਝੱਲ ਕੇ ਅਖੀਰ ਸਹਾਦਤ ਪਾਈ। ਮਜਬੂਰ ਹੋਇ ਕੇ ਹਮੇਂ ਤਲਵਾਰ ਕੇ ਕਬਜ਼ੇ ਤੇ ਹਾਥ ਰਾਖਨਾ ਪੜਾ। ਸੋ ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਐਸੀ ਹਾਲਤ ਮੇ ਔਰ ਕਾਈ ਰਾਸਤਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਥਾ। ਫਿਰ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਾਂ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਮੁਖ ਥੀਂ ਇੰਜ ਬਚਨ ਕੀਆ...।[132]
>
> The true Guru smiled delightedly upon hearing this *dohā* of Dadu Ram recited by Mahant Jait Ram. He then said, "Sant ji, all you say is, in fact, true. See here, Guru Arjan suffered many afflictions while residing in Lahore and ultimately obtained martyrdom. The sixth true Guru also suffered for many years while he was interned as a prisoner within the fort of Gwalior. Our father, the ninth Guru, went to Delhi and had to endure unbearable miseries and indescribable sufferings, and in the end, he too attained martyrdom. Having no option, therefore, I grasped the sword by its hilt. In the light of such conditions, Sant ji, there was no other path to follow." And then the true Guru said the following from his blessed mouth. . . .

The passage recited is of course *bait* 22, which Guru Gobind Singh subsequently supplements by reciting a further *dohā* of Dadu that accords well with the sentiment this *sākhī* is meant to evoke, the same sentiment we see in the reference to *Ẓafar-nāmah* 22.[133] This *sākhī* is quite interesting in that here we not only have no reference whatsoever to the evacuation of Anandpur but, as

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far as I know, the first attempt to justify the Sikh turn to martial activity by referencing the martyrdoms of the fifth and ninth Gurus. Such a justification makes me question the rather early date of this collection, or perhaps this individual *sākhī*, placing it more in line with Ratan Singh Bhangu's *Gur-panth Prakāś*, completed, as we now know, sometime in the years between 1810–13, which also highlights the martyrdoms of the two Sikh Gurus, a date that also makes more sense to me when we note the appearance of English words within the *Gurū kīān Sākhīān*.[134] What differentiates Swarup Singh Kaushish's focus from contemporary, Singh Sabha–inspired Sikh understandings of *bait* 22 is that he appropriates this single *bait* to sustain his argument about the turn to arms without subsuming the entire text of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* to this sole interpretation, a point we note in an earlier *sākhī* of Kaushish in which the epistle is referenced (*sākhī* 85).

This *sākhī* is, however, the very rare exception, and since it was originally written in the script of the bhatts (*bhaṭṭāchchharī* or *bhaṭṭ akhkhārī*) rather than in Gurmukhi it is likely that it was not widely circulated until its transliteration into Gurmukhi in 1869 at the hands of Bhatt Chajju Singh Kaushish.[135] General concerns in early to mid-nineteenth-century texts regarding the *Ẓafar-nāmah* are either the clear praise of the divine or the buttressing of their own descriptions of the battle of Chamkaur (*Gur-panth Prakāś*) and the tyranny of the emperor Aurangzeb.[136] Khushwaqt Rai's Persian history of the Sikhs, the *Tārīk̲h-i Aḥvāl-i Sikhān* (1811 CE), incorporates these concerns while also absorbing many of the *bait*s (including *Ẓafar-nāmah* 22, although it is in no way singled out) that make harsh remonstrations against Aurangzeb's oath-breaking.[137] The same general lack of attention to *bait* 22 on the part of later interpreters also concerns the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s intertextual references to the *Sh̲āh-nāmah*. This failure to note the stark similarities between these two texts, particularly for Persian Sikh writers, is most likely attributed to the fact that the *Sh̲āh-nāmah* was understood not as an Indic but rather as an Islamicate (more likely Islamic) text by later Sikh exegetes, a connection that clearly associated the epic with the Mughals against whom Guru Gobind Singh and eighteenth-century Khalsa Sikhs were generally pitted in Sikh narratives of the period.[138] What this seems to tell us is that for the majority of contemporary Sikhs surrounding the tenth Guru and for those immediately afterward, the *Sh̲āh-nāmah* as a cultural text did not mean a great deal. The *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s intended audience was once again a cultured Mughal one.

As implied above, this now reified understanding of *bait* 22 and the *Ẓafar-nāmah* as a complete text has also diverted scholarly attention away from the intertextual interaction that positions this couplet in relation to Sa'di's

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well-known others and produces reverberations that pulsate out from the very heart of the couplet and the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, a situation it bears repeating, that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *Ẓafar-nāmah* commentators also failed to appreciate. As far as I know, all such interpreters of the epistle, including even those modern-day ones who are aware of *bait* 22's *Gulistān* and/or *Būstān* origins, take the *bait* at face value, as a common-sense argument to which Guru Gobind Singh makes reference in order to justify his choice to engage Mughal forces at Chamkaur in battle after agreeing (albeit reluctantly) to evacuate Anandpur.[139] Modern interpretations do differ slightly from most earlier ones, of course, in that they also transform this *bait* from a rationalization into a statement of future policy, so to speak, well in keeping with the new historical context of British colonialism in which Sikhs, particularly those Sikh intellectuals of the Singh Sabhas, found themselves.

But these are for the most part only surface meanings. Delving into the couplet's and the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s depths, we quickly discover a very significant absence within the Guru's epistle. Although Guru Gobind Singh speaks of "all other means" (*hamah ḥīlati*) being preferable to taking up weapons in *bait* 22, nowhere in the text itself do we find these alternative methods spelled out. Certainly, previous *bait*s would have provided the ideal space in which to elaborate upon these other strategies, but the closest we come to such a description appears in *bait* 21,

بہ لاچارگی در میان آمدم بتدبیر تیر و تفنگ آمدم[140]

I came to the battlefield with no alternative (*bah lāchāragī*) [left to me]; I came with the aim of using arrow and gun,

which implies other means, but provides no real description of alternate options at all. Santokh Singh will appear to later pick up on this deficiency in his lengthy narrative of the Battle of Chamkaur, the skirmish to which *Ẓafar-nāmah* 22 apparently alludes, in his mid-nineteenth-century *Sūraj Prakāś*. In his telling, Santokh Singh inserts into what he most likely perceives as the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s heavy silence the four principles of Indic diplomacy, *sām*, *dām*, *bhed*, and *daṇḍ* (spells, bribes, cunning, and threats respectively), the quartet of traditional means through which Indian kings attained their goals as enunciated by Krishna in the Mahabharata.[141] According to our esteemed Nirmala Sikh author, when the tenth Guru realized that he and his forty Khalsa Sikhs were surrounded by both pahari and Mughal forces (whose numbers were now enhanced by those Ranghars and Gujars opposed to the Khalsa), he said:

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ਅਬਿ ਤੋ ਉਪਾਇ ਸਾਮ ਦਾਮ ਭੇਦ ਬਨੈ ਨਹਿੰ । ਚੌਥੇ ਦੰਡ ਬਨੈ ਦਲ ਲਾਖੋ ਚੜਿ ਆਯੋ ਹੈ । ਗਿਦਰ ਕੀ ਮੌਤ ਨਹਿੰ ਮਰੋ ਰਿਪੁ ਹਾਥਨਿ ਤੇ । ਕਰੋ ਜੁਧ ਗਾਢੋ ਜਿਮ ਪੂਰਬ ਮਚਾਯੋ ਹੈ । ਮਹਾਂ ਨੀਚ ਪਾਪੀ ਕੂਰ ਲਾਪੀ ਦਗ਼ਾ ਕੀਨੋ ਜਿਮ । ਪਲਟੇ ਕੋ ਲੈ ਹੈ ਪੰਥ ਮੂਲ ਦੈ ਉਖਾਰਿ ਕੈ ।[141]

From this point on there is no time to make use of incantation, bribery, and guile (*sām, dām, bhed*). We must employ the fourth [of these precepts], battle (*daṇḍ*), as an army one hundred thousand strong has been mounted [against us]. Do not die like cowardly jackals but destroy the enemy with your very hands and fight with the same valor you have manifest in the past. Tear out the roots of the community of those wicked sinners who spew forth lies, and exact retribution for their deceit (i.e., the oath they have broken).

Obviously, Santokh Singh clearly looks to Indic sources to populate what he understands as silence.[143] But the epistle's gap(s) here are purposeful and ring out loudly to those whose ears are attuned to Islamicate resonances. It is these to which the author of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* gives voice, albeit in manner far less straightforward and perceptible than speaking them aloud. The absence of any such means itself in the *Ẓafar-nāmah* suggests that the author's intention was to have readers or listeners closely "listen" to the *bait*'s intertextual resonance, reverberations in which can be heard the various ruses described in both Sa'di's *Būstān* and *Gulistān*, the texts in which *bait* 22 originates.

In both of Sa'di's texts, the original *bait* is set within the context of advice on justice and management, and on the possession of sound judgment, ultimately advocating peace and negotiation (or the use of gold) over battle unless conflict is clearly inevitable. Afterward it then prescribes how to soundly (and ethically) engage in hostilities and how to judge the enemy's reactions to both war and, subsequently, to further overtures of peace. The immediate section with which we are concerned begins by stating that

همی تا برآید به تدبیر کار مدارای دشمن به از کارزار
چو نتوان عدو را به قوّت شکست به نعمت بباید در فتنه بست[144]

Until a matter is completed by management (*tadbīr*) conciliation toward an enemy is better than dispute. When you cannot break an enemy with might then favor will bolt [the lock of] trouble's door.

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Ẓafar-nāmah 22 resonates with the sound of such caveats, many of which, as above, suggest the ruses to be first attempted (*mudārā* or "conciliation" and *ni'amat* or "favor" in Sa'di's previous *baits*). Such allusions would not have escaped the attention of the alert Mughal reader of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. Where was the Mughal courtier not familiar with the *Būstān* or the *Shāh-nāmah*, for that matter?

Although the *Gulistān*'s *pand* is very brief, comprised of no more than two *baits*,[145] the *Būstān*'s Tale 19 is lengthy and divided into a number of sections that speak regularly of the tyrant (*jafā' gustarī*: "spreader of discord") and the efforts other rulers should undertake to ensure the absence of conflict, and how to manage such conflict if forced to do so (one way being to treat soldiers well during times of calm). But ultimately the absence of conflict trumps all regardless of whether one is powerful or weak. As Sa'di states in a number of earlier *baits* in the same tale:

مزن تا توانی بر ابرو گره که دشمن اگر چه ز بون دوست به[146]

Do not become angry if you can avoid it: for however vile an enemy may be a friend is better.

and

اگر پیل زوری و گر شیر چنگ به نزدیک من صلح بهتر که جنگ[147]

Even if you are as strong as an elephant or as sharp clawed as a lion, peace, in my opinion, is better than war,

claims very much in the spirit of Qur'an 2:190 and 8:61.[148] Although the Guru appropriates Sa'di's important *bait* to justify his past actions, he is also simultaneously heeding the poet's advice for his present course and reminding the emperor of the prudence of doing likewise.[149] The transformation of *bait* 22 into both the epistle's and the Sikh tradition's foremost tenet in regard to the choice to engage in hostilities (in other words, to broadcast the understanding that Sa'di appears to have originally fostered) suggests that the Singh Sabha recognized this facet of the Guru's epistle, although nowhere in the writings of its many ideologues do we discover such an acknowledgement to the best of my knowledge. Guru Gobind Singh is mindful of Sa'di's counsel in a manner so obvious that one is forced to wonder how his strategy has escaped our attention for so long. He attempts to deal with Aurangzeb not

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through the actual steel of the sword but through the very kindness and negotiation upon which Sa'di elaborates in the tale:

گر اندیشه باشد ز بشمن گزند به تعویذ احسان زبانش ببند[150]

If you are concerned about the injury that an enemy can inflict tie his tongue with the spell of benevolence,

says Sa'di, "For benevolence," he continues, "makes sharp teeth blunt" (*kah iḥsān kunad kund dandān-i tez*).[151] The *Ẓafar-nāmah* is itself this benevolent spell (*ta'wīẕ-i iḥsān*), the literal expression of the "other stratagems" that are noted in *bait* 22 in that, put simply, it is a letter on a piece of paper and thus not a weapon at all.[152] And so it was to my utter delight that I observed, as I looked outward from the compound of Gurdwara Zafarnama Lohgarh Sahib in village Dina from where, according to tradition, the Guru had entrusted his letter into the capable hands of Bhais Daya and Dharam Singh, the following shabad of Shaikh Farid on the top back side of the *darwājā* or gateway to the complex (figure 3.2):

ਫਰੀਦਾ ਬੁਰੇ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ ਕਰ ਗੁਸਾ ਮਨਿ ਨ ਹਢਾਇ ॥ ਦੇਹੀ ਰੋਗੁ ਨ ਲਗਾਈ ਪਲੇ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਪਾਇ ॥[153]

O Farid, counter evil with good will and do not cloak (*haḍhāi*, "wear") your mind with vengeance (*gusān*, "anger"). [In this way] your body shall be disease-free and so you shall receive everything.

Obviously, the decision to paint this shabad onto the gate was not an arbitrary one as the spirit behind this statement accords very well with what I interpret to be the tenth Guru's intention at the back of both *bait* 22 and the *Ẓafar-nāmah* as a whole. But the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, Shaikh Farid's *ślok* notwithstanding, is nevertheless a *maṡnavī* that simultaneously brandishes an aesthetic and moral sword (*shamshīr*),[154] a discursive blade whose edge has been sharpened by both Sa'di and (more significantly) Ferdausi, and the point of which (pun intended) later Sikh historiography tantalizingly unsheathes and uses to strike home at the very heart of the Mughal empire, as we shall see. Here we once again hear echoes of Pilsom's caution that those who act impetuously will accrue pain and remorse. The very fact that Guru Gobind Singh could compose such an extraordinary epistle, in poetry no less, after

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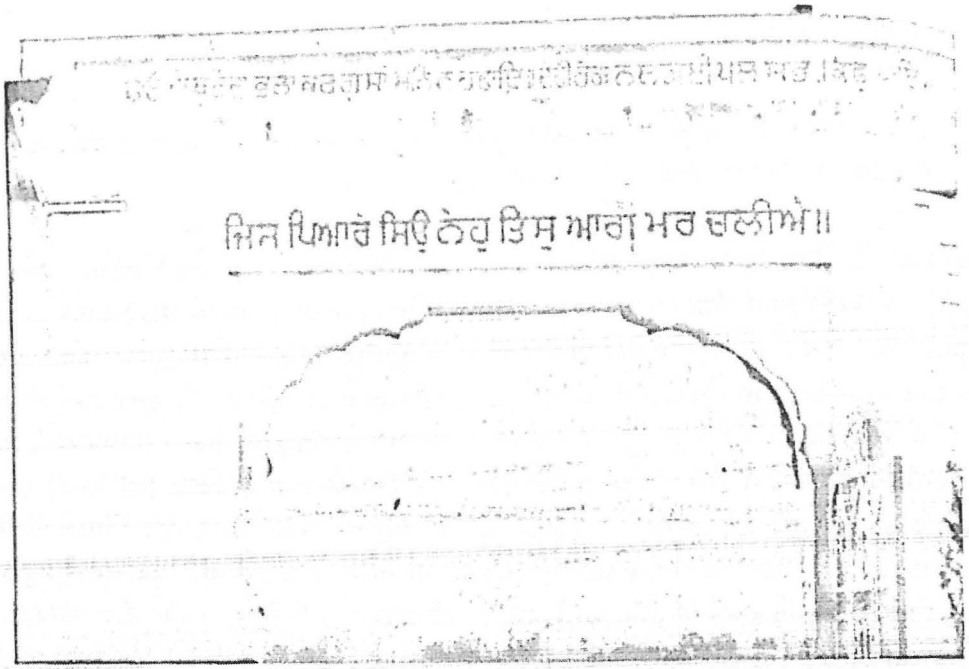

FIGURE 3.2. Gate looking outward from Gurdwara Zafarnama Lohgarh Sahib, village Dina, with inscribed shabads of Shaikh Farid (top) and Guru Angad (bottom). Photo by author, December 2010.

having experienced such tragedy is in itself a testament to the Guru's and his Sikhs' survival, to their victory.

It seems clear that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is the only sword that the Guru had available to him after the Battle of Chamkaur—and one that he uses to startling effect assuming that Aurangzeb was prompted to meet with him (as the *ḥasbulḥukm* notes) after the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s reception. The *Ẓafar-nāmah* in this light assumes the form of an intriguing tautology: certainly the Guru was routed by Mughal forces at both Anandpur and Chamkaur; put bluntly, he and his Sikh were militarily defeated and left scattered. But his victory comes about because of his writing the letter of victory—and the emperor's (or that of his representative's) reading of the epistle. The poem itself has made its underlying claim come true, in other words, not so much via the Guru's victory in escaping Anandpur and Chamkaur as narrated within the epistle but through its facilitation of a meeting between the tenth Guru and the emperor, a meeting which was in itself a victory.[55] Tradition seems to play on this tautological element to discursively position the tenth Guru as the victor in this extended encounter, overturning the reality of the Guru's and his Sikhs' defeat. This may nevertheless imply that Aurangzeb did feel remorse

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for either his or his representatives' oath-breaking—or, more likely, that the emperor, as an eighteenth-century reader well aware of the Persian letter's resonances, was able to use this epistle's request for political advantage, perhaps keeping the Guru away from the Punjab in the hope of obviating any kind of resentment emanating out from the pahari region, an action that would help to ease any potential rebellion before and during the period of transition from Aurangzeb to his successful son and heir, a changeover that likely seemed inevitable to Aurangzeb, who was after all approaching his ninetieth year. Modern Sikh tradition regarding the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s success, therefore, may be factual, although such factuality was unearthed by differing means: Aurangzeb's fidelity to the practice of *realpolitik*.

This passage may also suggest other intriguing possibilities. When we set it within the context of the Dasam Granth, for example, particularly those Brajbhasha compositions concerned with dharma generally and the tenth Guru's maintenance of dharma specifically, we find here a dimension to *bait* 22 that is very much Indic or shastric in nature, an allusion upon which Santokh Singh later picks up, as we have seen, and one perhaps to what Jan Heesterman refers to as the "inner conflict of tradition" in regard to Indian kingship.[156] As the tenth Guru had inherited the mantle of *mīrī-pīrī* from his grandfather, Guru Hargobind, and as such was both a spiritual and secular sovereign wielding two such swords if you will, and as he was the Master of Anandpur and the equivalent of Aurangzeb at least within the context of the moral universe of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* (as we shall see), Guru Gobind Singh was inevitably aware of that same "inner conflict" into which Heesterman's scholarship delves. The conflict is of course the age-old one in India, namely that the king's authority is ultimately a conundrum in that it is compromised in the context of both the shastras and other dharmic texts: in order to rule the king (in our case, the Guru) must kill, which makes him unclean or impure, but the only way he can uphold righteousness or dharma is to draw out the sword and to administer the *daṇḍā* (justice or, literally, "the big stick").[157] Dharma and its maintenance therefore, a point upon which the tenth Guru regularly elaborates throughout the writings attributed to him, logically implies the use of violence, violence which is just yet nevertheless bloody and fatal. In many Dasam Granth compositions attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, we discover him perhaps attempting to laboriously convince both himself and his readers/listeners about the purifying nature of the violence that permeates those accounts of gods, goddesses, and divinized beings about whom he writes, as well as explaining his own use of violence, which we find in the *Bachitar Nāṭak*.[158] In a somewhat different way, *bait* 22 likewise provides the

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Guru's justification for his own past use of the sword. The thrust of *bait* 22 in this light is therefore akin to those many verses in Indic texts such as the Mahabharata and the *Arthāśāstra* that implicitly warn the king not to transgress the limits of his authority, in this case by suggesting weapons only as a last resort. Put another way, *bait* 22 may be understood as instrumental during the righteousnessless condition of *apadharma* (lit., "dharma in extremity"): Anandpur provided the tenth Guru with a situation under which the ideal dharmic order, dharma as understood by the Khalsa specifically, simply ceased to function as clearly observed by the violation of oaths held to be sacred. His response therefore, as a king/Guru who monitors dharma, was to attempt to restore the dharmic order through the steel of his sword (and arrows), symbolized as the divine, playing on the classical theme of the avatar we find in Hindu mythology and its Sikh adaption within the *Bachitar Nāṭak*. Within the *Bachitar Nāṭak* it is Akal Purakh who commands the Guru to set the wheel of "dharma in motion."[159] Such also relates to our earlier discussion of the king and his *rāj*, the goal of which is to maintain dharam. After all, the tenth Guru's father, let us recall, died in order to protect brahmanical symbols and dharma, and such protection is one of the foremost duties of all kings in Indic literature.

Another such possibility we perceive is the idea that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is a moral and discursive sword that appears to cut through temporal distinctions: in the epistle the Guru speaks of drawing weapons out in the battles past, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is itself the present sword which aims to strike at Aurangzeb and the Mughal darbar, and it is so in that it outlines and further implies future consequences for the emperor's harsh actions and betrayals by making loud references to both the *Shāh-nāmah* and the *Būstān*. It may thus allude to and encapsulate in itself one of the characteristics that later hagiographers noted of Guru Gobind Singh himself, that he is the master of the past, the present, and the future,[160] and as a poetic manifestation of such the *Ẓafar-nāmah* may also prefigure the guruship of itself, the "*bāṇī*-fication" of the Guru's Epistle of Victory to put it somewhat crudely.

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4

Authorship

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਮੁਖਵਾਕ ਪਾਤਿਸ਼ਾਹੀ ੧੦ ॥

Uttered from the blessed mouth of the Tenth King.

BECAUSE OF REFERENCES such as those above to the *Sẖāh-nāmah*, the *Būstān*, and other components of the Persian canon, a part of the epistle's classical literary style, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is often surrounded by controversy: there are, as a consequence, Sikh scholars and scholars of Sikh history who find it quite unlikely that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* before us today was written by the tenth Guru and sent to the emperor. This is not an unreasonable assumption since, on the one hand, Guru Gobind Singh was the Guru and was thus beholden to no human being but to the One Lord alone in whom apparently the Guru has complete trust (a point the *Ẓafar-nāmah* often repeats) while, on the other, tradition implies, one may ask how the tenth Master could bring himself to petition the emperor who had not only evicted the tenth Guru from his patrimony but had also visited much tragedy upon the Guru's family.[2] To this we may add the issue to which both Jaswant Singh Bhaur and Gurcharan Singh Sahinsara allude, namely that scholars have cast doubt on the Guru's authorship because there is no history of a warrior within Mughal India writing his own letter of victory.[3]

Scholars such as Gurbachan Singh Talib concur with these claims and add that the Guru could not have written the text because he was too well versed with Mughal literary and diplomatic conventions. How could he be otherwise when his literary court was staffed by poet-courtiers such as Bhai Nand Lal Goya and Kavi Alam, both of whose many years in the service of the Indo-Timurids, as the *mīr-munsẖī* or principal scribe of Prince Muʿazzam/Bahadar Shah himself in Nand Lal's case, made them thoroughly cognizant of Mughal etiquette and literary standards?[4] Sikh tradition also adamantly claims that as a child the Guru himself was as rigorously trained in the courtly arts as

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the princes of the royal Timurid line.[5] Would either Guru Gobind Singh or an erudite courtier like Nand Lal allow such an extraordinary, verse (rather than prose) petition to make its way to the emperor's court and perhaps be rejected out of hand?[6] Traditional *'arż dāsht*, Talib argues, were straightforward documents in "extremely courteous" and "decorous" prose, often petitioning the Mughal court to correct a local situation gone askew or to fulfill some personal request such as the appeal of the *bakhshī* of the *ahādī* soldiers Inayat Khan, who petitioned Jahangir that he be transferred from Gujarat to Agra because of illness.[7] These were certainly not admonishing letters, however much deserved, which accused the Mughal ruler and his representatives in the harshest of terms, of breaking oaths upon the Qur'an, being ungodly, and straying from the principles of Islam (*dūr ast dīn*, a rather awkward way of saying "he [the emperor] is far from faith").[8]

The counter to this claim, of course, is that educated Sikh courtiers and poets would have encouraged the Guru to petition the Mughal in a style unlike that we find in the standard *'arż dāsht* to thus ensure that the tenth Master's requests caught the eye of some official and ultimately came under the emperor's gaze. After all, if his court did include ex-Mughal courtiers and poets it is likely that the Guru was aware that Aurangzeb's literary tastes tended toward poetry (despite the tenacious claims of the emperor's later biographers), especially poetry that included a strong moral emphasis, as the *Ẓafar-nāmah* most certainly does.[9] Couching requests within a poetic framework was certainly not an uncommon practice within the Guru's court as the *dohrā* addressed to Mata Jito and found on the opening folio of the *Anandpurī Bīṛh* by the poet Mangal suggests, a request actually indicated by the term *ardās*.[10] Furthermore, the receipt of uncommon form letters, it appears, did have precedents during the Indo-Timurid period of Indian history (in the nineteenth century one still comes across the use of ghazals in an attempt to settle disputes).[11] Epistolographers and clerks and writers and poets both within and outside of the Mughal court were often guaranteed an audience with the emperor or his courtiers through the latter's receipt of the former's innovative prose or verse, stories about which virtually every famous Mughal poet could recite: "Everyone writing a letter," claims Muhammad Ghani, "endeavoured to produce as beautiful letters as he could [*sic*] so as to attract the notice of the addressee...."[12] These included poets and litterateurs as revered as Akbar's *malikushshu'arā'* or poet laureate (made so in 1588) Abu'l Faiz ibn Mubarak 'Allami, known by the *takhallus* Faizi (AH 954–1004/1547–95 CE) the brother of Abu'l Fazl, many of whose *'arż dāsht* "break away from the bondage of conventional phraseology and the rigid beginnings of the *murāfa'āt* (citations

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employing expressions of humility)...."[13] There is, moreover, the possibility that the tenth Guru's *ʿarż dāsht* that we find referenced in Mughal records was not the *Ẓafar-nāmah* but a different text.[14]

If the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was intended as an *ʿarż dāsht*, it is quite clear that it did not follow the standard petitioning format that G. S. Talib and other concurring scholars had in mind. It appears that in the understandings of such scholars the *ʿarż dāsht* is prepared to a very exacting standard, that of some strict formal prose petition. Certainly, numerous *ʿarż dāsht*s in this restricted fashion do exist—appropriating a virtual string of Persian salutations and extravagant descriptives that fell out of literary fashion by the late nineteenth century—and appeared so regularly that it is not uncommon to find these styles mimicked and critiqued in the hymns of well-known Hindu saints.[15] As a matter of fact, the most oft-repeated prayer within the Sikh tradition today, the Ardas that appears in the *Sikh Rahit Maryādā* and whose history we can trace back to at least the eighteenth century, takes its very name from this style of official document (although the character of the Sikh Ardas is far less ornate).[16] But it is also quite clear that during the Mughal period the term was applied much more liberally than Talib and others contend. According to Momin Mohiuddin, for example, "every letter whether private or official addressed to the Emperor is termed an *ʿarḍ-dāsht*, even if it tends to be a congratulatory letter or of condolence."[17] An example of just such a congratulatory *ʿarż dāsht* in which the writer, ʿAbdullah Khan, simply rejoices at having first received and later fulfilled the dictates of a *farmān* issued by the emperor Muhammad Shah early in the latter's reign (1719–48), appears in the early eighteenth-century *Shāh-nāmah Munawwar Kalām* of Shiv Das Lakhnawi. In this same extraordinary Persian chronicle written by a Hindu, we also discover references to many *ʿarż dāsht*s that simply make the recipient privy to local occurrences.[18] It is perhaps based on the sheer number and variety of such "petitions" and the varied use of the term *ʿarż dāsht* that ʿAli-Akbar Dehkhoda, in his indispensable Persian dictionary the *Lughat-nāmah*, notes in his definition of this term that

> در هندوستان بادشاه زادگان و امرا به جناب عالی وخردان به خدمت بزرگان نویسند[19]

> In Hindustan royals and nobles wrote the term [*ʿarż dāsht*] in the place of "His Most Exalted Majesty" and youngsters wrote it in the service of their elders.[20]

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Certainly a composition such as the *Ẓafar-nāmah* would be easily encompassed by these rather generous descriptions of the *ʿarż dāsht*. And as such these profuse definitions allow us to easily obviate the many sticky questions that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* poses as a strict petition. For although the Guru does articulate a grievance (the breaking of an oath) and a tacit hope that the emperor will act accordingly upon reflection of the letter's contents (i.e., to meet with the Guru), aspects which are very much a part of the formal petition—underscoring the shared moral universe of the tenth Guru and the emperor and as well a "transcendent moral order" which is in this case one governed by the divine—the tenth Guru nevertheless fails to clearly identify himself in the epistle, an equally elementary feature of petitions proper, which has undoubtedly led to much of the controversy surrounding the *Ẓafar-nāmah*.[21] Perhaps Guru Gobind Singh took for granted that his *vakīl* (presumably Bhai Daya Singh) as well as Aurangzeb's *gurzbardār* would have made the author of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*/*ʿarż dāsht* quite clear to the emperor, thus obviating the need for strict identification. As well, the lack of a signature may have been a manifestation of the tenth Guru's humility (a point to which we shall return at the end of this chapter). Throughout the Dasam Granth, we find such statements as *tvai praśād* (through Your grace) and *terā jor* (through Your strength), and although reminiscent of opening lines or terms within Persian letters such as *hū* (He exists) or *bismillāh* (In the name of God), such formulae nevertheless underscore the Guru's dependence upon the Lord. With such in mind, it appears that there was no need to assert the Guru's own authority: all came from Akal Purakh, of course a consistent theme encountered within the tenth Guru's epistle.[22]

One may be tempted to argue that the very title of the text would have reminded its intended royal Mughal audience of their own grand lineage as the term *Ẓafar-nāmah* is exactly the title of Amir Timur's famous biography, completed well after his death in 1424–25 CE by Sharafuddin ʿAli of Yazd and reproduced within the darbars of various Timurid rulers throughout the eastern Islamicate, including both the Uzbeks and the Mughals.[23] "Mullá Yazdí," we are told, "was held in high estimation for his *inshá*" in his own country and in India.[24] Surprisingly, the title of the work is, as we shall see, not noted within the Guru's letter itself (although the earliest *nastaʿlīq* copy I have seen does begin with this title),[25] and despite the likelihood that this is the title that the tenth Guru had originally intended (for reasons one may infer from the previous discussion), its absence within the text itself forces us to defer such speculation in this direction. We shall further take up this theme of naming later on.

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Talib's conjecture as well as that of other scholars, despite their strict understanding of the *'arż dāsht*, seems justified as, once again, there appears to be no extant very early eighteenth-century copy of the text and so no distinguishing colophon, nor any further specific marks of identification. Must one therefore simply suspend judgment on the question of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s authorship? Perhaps not, as recent enquiries into the nature of authorship within Indian religious traditions and literature provide fertile soil into which to replant this hitherto-unsprouted seed. These make clear, after Elizabeth Einstein, that the concept of authorship that focuses upon an independent, distinct individual has its roots not in Indic discourse but rather in a pre-Enlightenment western context.[26]

Let us consider first of all the fact that Guru Gobind Singh did most certainly send a letter to the emperor Aurangzeb, a letter that tradition claims is the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. The text as a private letter was thus not intended for even limited transmission, let alone wide circulation (this was no *hukam-nāmā*). How in this case did contemporary Sikhs become privy to the letter's contents? And how, one may ask as a corollary to this question, was such content communicated through contemporary Sikh filters; how, in other words, did Sikhs (the vast majority of whom were illiterate in this period) interpret this written document in a predominantly oral culture?[27] (Oral for certain although with a definite recognition of writing, a "literacy-aware" culture of orality if you will as Christopher Bayly makes clear).[28] The later historiography of the letter itself intimates only very little in this regard but does tacitly imply a type of corporate, textured authorship, which follows precedents we generally note in other genres of South Asian Islamicate literature and poetry:[29] the letter was passed from the Guru to his couriers (it is significant that this is also noted in the Mughal documents reproduced above: the reference to the Guru's *vakīl* for instance) in whose company it remained for some months as they made their way to Ahmadnagar. We will return to its narrative journey shortly, but for now suffice it to say that tradition also notes that the Guru's order was read out to the various sangats with which the couriers temporarily resided as they made their way southward.[30] That pious (and, more importantly, literate)[31] members of these congregations made a point of transcribing the Guru's words is not an implausible suggestion given, as we shall see, the contemporary importance ascribed to words and writings attributed to the Sikh Gurus (*gur-bāṇī* for example) within eighteenth-century Sikh tradition and the sacrosanct status awarded to anything material associated with the Sikh Gurus. That they clearly understood it is another matter altogether,

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although a quite nominal understanding of Persian may be assumed among such Sikhs based on both the popularity of the Punjabi *qiṣṣah* tradition (which evolved primarily from the Persian poetic tradition)[32] and on the fact that most administration was conducted in Persian. That manuscript copies of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* exist mainly in Gurmukhi script and that certain *bait*s appear "corrupted," that is to say with the omission of the *ezāfah* (which would in turn corrupt the meter) and the misuse of *–rā* among other such stylistic errors,[33] adds weight to such conjecture assuming that the vast majority of Sikh congregants only possessed a superficial familiarity with Persian and Perso-Arabic script. Sikh sacred stories in regard to the journeys of the original Adi Granth manuscript, their questionable veracity notwithstanding, also suggest such trajectories.[34]

Such discrepancies in style, including both the existence of alternate *bait*s as well as the addition of extra couplets in certain manuscripts (to which we shall return), may, rather than demonstrate the "corruption" of perhaps an original text, point in the direction of the oral poetic nature of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, in which Sikh reciters, *kathākar*s and *giānī*s among others, may have taken a very limited liberty with the epistle, depending upon the context in which they were delivering it, perhaps "reflecting an oral tradition of formulaic composition," in the words of Olga Davidson, without altering the text's core meaning, the expression of outrage at a perceived wrong and the pursuit of justice and redress.[35] In the case of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, unlike that regarding the apparent compilation of the *Shāh-nāmah* to which Davidson refers, this would have been particularly limited, limited of course because it was very well known among eighteenth-century Sikhs that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was a written letter sent by the Sikh Guru and as such its words, like *bāṇī*, were meant to remain inviolable.[36] The regular oral transmission (rather than composition) of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* however would, for example, explain the fact that *Ẓafar-nāmah* 80 merely paraphrases the specific couplet referenced from the story of Seyavash, omitting the term *badī*, "evil" in Ferdausi's text[37] and, as well, helps to enlighten us as to the repetition of such stock phrases as *be-bīn gardash–i bī-vafā-ye zamān* "See the infidelity with which the world turns," a common expression that may help oral poets recompose their stories.[38] The letter's inclusion within a compendium like the Dasam Granth, the majority of whose works were likely intended for oral performance (although not composed orally) seems to bear this out in my opinion. It appears clearly from the manuscript evidence that within the eighteenth century, the written text of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* coexisted with an oral tradition of its recitation, a point we can easily infer from other eighteenth-century Sikh literature and traditions,

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particularly certain compositions within the Dasam Granth, the *janam-sakhis* and the *gur-bilās* texts.[39]

As mentioned earlier, this Persian letter does not contain any explicit means by which to identify it as the work of the tenth Guru—it lacks, in other words, any form of signature line common to Persian poetry (*takhallus*) and Brajbhasha/classical Hindi texts (*chhāp*, "seal"). As such it cannot be said to communicate authority in the same way as do certain poetic works within various Islamic, Hindu, and Sikh traditions.[40] It does in a very qualified sense follow patterns we see in more Islamically inclined Islamicate literature. As noted, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is a private letter and although rare for such documents to be transformed into sacred writ, such augmentation is not completely unheard of. One immediately thinks of the Pauline epistles, but much closer to the subcontinent are the collected letters of Sufi *shaikhs*, the *maktūbāt* and the so-called table-talks or *malfūẓāt* of Sufi pirs loosely structured along the same lines as the *Fawā'id al-fu'ād* (Morals for the Heart), which records the conversations of the thirteenth-century Chishti Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya' by his disciple Amir Hasan Sijzi Dihlawi.[41]

Certainly the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is close in spirit to these on a number of levels. It is first of all a letter written for and sent to a high-ranking Mughal courtier (in this case the highest ranking courtier of the Mughal darbar). Precedents here would include Shaikh Muhammad Baqi-Billah's correspondence with courtiers such as Mirza 'Aziz Koka, the son of the unfortunate Shamsuddin Muhammad Atkah Khan and the emperor Akbar's *ṣadruṣṣudūr* (the chief administrator of religious patronage) and the *maktūbāt* of his illustrious disciple Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, about seventy letters from which (out of almost 600) were sent to Mughal officials.[42] Sirhindi's letters in particular and some of those of his Naqshbandi successors had moreover become early on for the Naqshbandi *silsilah* (lit., "chain": lineage) a source of spiritual guidance that has continued to this day,[43] a characteristic that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* most certainly demonstrated for Sikhs not long after the tenth Guru's death and that continues to do so today.[44] The difference between these two examples, of course, is that many Sufi authors like Ahmad Sirhindi were well aware of the importance of their letters in guiding the faithful; Sirhindi as a matter of fact asked disciples to make copies of certain letters to distribute and often referred his addressees to other missives in his large assortment, a collection which, later biographers of the Sufi shaikh note, he himself oversaw and helped organize in his lifetime.[45] Clearly, Sirhindi's letters were along with those of other Sufi shaikhs and poets destined for a wider readership, fueling both religious and political debates well into the early twentieth century.[46]

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Although possible, it seems to me highly unlikely that Guru Gobind Singh himself engaged in any such activity with regard to his letter to the emperor. His disciples, on the other hand, no doubt did, as the large number of eighteenth-century manuscript copies of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* make clear.

It is with this in mind that we turn to the *malfūẓāt*. It appears on the surface that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* differs a great deal from *malfūẓāt*, particularly in regard to format, as the latter are the records of the pir's conversations kept by pious devotees, who make clear within the text of the *malfūẓāt* their intention to record the utterances of their master.[47] The insinuations within the Sikh tradition noted above, that is that Sikhs along the letter's route may have transcribed and perhaps in the process augmented and transformed the letter, ultimately into sacred writ, may suggest a connection. Certainly, contemporary and later understandings of the Guru's letter may have been similar to those of the *malfūẓāt*. A clue in this regard is the fact that certain *malfūẓāt* were "canonized" shortly after these oral discourses were recorded and thus accorded a status much like that we might envision bestowed upon the *Ẓafar-nāmah*.[48] As the *malfūẓāt* were attempts to "reproduce the whole experience of a saint's company," according to Amina Steinfels, and thus to evoke the Sufi's mystical presence for the pious listener,[49] this should elicit little surprise. That such an understanding is partially commensurate with the idea of Guru Granth and also accords with the purposes of both the *janam-sakhi* and *gur-bilās* literature is worth noting, a point upon which we have already elaborated.[50]

For the majority of Sikhs today as well as those Sikhs of the eighteenth century, there was and remains no question as to the historical author of the text. As *bāṇī*, the text of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* like that of other Sikh scriptures is not only edifying, but also prompts the presence of the Guru particularly in the public and private setting of the sangat or the darbar. Not only does this text function as the "embodiment" of devotion, in the words of Karen Prentiss, but it is as well a very intimate manifestation of Sikh sovereignty and grandeur, collective and perhaps individual, through the person of Guru Gobind Singh and the memory of the Battle of Chamkaur that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* prompts, shapes, and ultimately refines.[51] In the words of the eminent Sikh theologian Bhai Gurdas Bhalla:

ਭਗਵਤ ਕਥਾ ਅਰਧਨ ਕਉ ਧਾਰਨੀਕ ਲਿਖਤ ਕ੍ਰਿਤਾਸ ਪਤ੍ਰ ਬੰਧ ਮੋਖਦਾਇ ਹੈ ।[52]

When the story of the divine (*bhagwat*) embellished with adoration is written on paper (*kritās*) the very paper itself (*patr*) grants release from bondage [to the transmigratory cycle].

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The questions still remains: Can one establish the final word on the issue of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s authorship? Although we have speculated a great deal regarding the Guru's own authorship, no specific answer has yet come forth. This is because at this point there is simply not enough evidence at our disposal to make the case concrete. Something may yet be done however if or when some long-sought-after early eighteenth-century manuscript that makes the distinct connection between the tenth Guru and the epistle emerges. Until then, we rely predominantly upon tradition and circumstantial evidence. It is in this light therefore perhaps best to appropriate a process of exclusion—and I must add that this is a point that sways me to accept the general Khalsa Sikh tradition's claim of the Guru's authorship—namely that if Guru Gobind Singh did not write the epistle then who could have done so?

Let us keep in mind that the letter only slightly predates the writing of the earliest examples of the *rahit-nāmā* and *gur-bilās* literature. In one regard, the question of the authorship of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* may be tentatively answered by examining claims to authorship of these sources, particularly that of the *rahit-nāmās*, the writing of which was very much in the interest of post-1708 Khalsa Sikhs as these manuals emphasized perhaps above all else the need for unity among members of the small number of Khalsa panths during the turbulent eighteenth century as they attempted to secure the sovereignty all believed promised them by the tenth Guru and made rather explicit within the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. In these manuals of conduct, there are clear and unequivocal associations with pious, well-known, and esteemed Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh's darbar such as Bhai Nand Lal Goya and Bhais Daya and Prahilad Singh, all of whom are believed to have repeated the words of the tenth Sikh Master in the respective *rahit-nāmās* attributed to them.[53] That such dutiful and devout Sikhs of the Guru's darbar actually wrote these *rahit-nāmās* is unlikely as, in the case of the manuals attributed to Bhai Nand Lal, it seems difficult to comprehend of a poet of the good Bhai Sahib's caliber writing in the type of pedestrian Punjabi which graces these texts.[54] Actual authorship notwithstanding, such clear associations to these revered men and to their Guru grant the later (silent) voices of the actual *rahit-nāmā* authors a legitimacy that it appears was taken to heart by a number of very significant Sikh chiefs in the eighteenth century who, we must add, given the contingencies of the moment in many cases, opted to follow the advice of just such certain manuals of conduct (in other instances they did not, however).[55] Such communities of Sikhs were also apparently cognizant of the courtly ideals and forms of comportment put forth in the *gur-bilās* literature, a popular eighteenth-century variety of text that also indirectly traces its origins to the tenth Guru's court.

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I would like to suggest that the fact that Guru Gobind Singh did not identify himself in the epistle in this instance makes a far stronger case for his authorship of it than if he did. If written by later eighteenth-century Khalsa Sikhs to support the sovereignty that both the *rahit-nāmās* and *gur-bilās* literature regularly prognosticate, a document of this nature that makes a direct claim to such independence and authority would have been explicitly associated with the tenth Master within the very text of the letter through the inclusion by the alleged Sikh author/copyist of some kind of signature line. Such a *bait* or *meṣra'* would have in no way been out of place as a signature line formed a conventional facet of both Persian *ghazal* and *maṡnavī* poetry, not to mention of *gur-bāṇī* and of many of the compositions of the Dasam Granth.[56] That such an assumed *bait* is absent suggests that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was already in the early eighteenth century considered sacrosanct by any Khalsa Sikhs who may have copied the epistle and understood as equally so by any member of the Sikh court or its eighteenth-century service groups bound by the memory of the Guru's glorious darbar and the idea of perfectibility through loyal and loving service to their exceptionally erudite master courtier, the tenth Guru. The closest point to which later scribes were willing to go to specifically identify the epistle without "corrupting" it (in the way that the inclusion of hymns within the Adi Granth by figures other than the Gurus were later deemed to make the text "brackish")[57] therefore was the addition of *srī mukh vāk patiśāhī dasvīn* within the colophon placed generally on the first folio of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*.

Finally, it seems to make sense that Guru Gobind Singh would have petitioned the emperor to correct his local situation, the epistle's emphasis on proper etiquette and morality notwithstanding. Let us remember that the Guru resided within a highly competitive arena, pahari Punjab, which proffered a number of independent claims to sovereignty. Despite *birādarī* associations between Sikhs and pahari Rajputs, mythical and actual, none of the Rajput kingdoms that were confronted by Prince Mu'azzam during his 1696 expedition to the Punjab and with whom Aurangzeb later allied would be able to later offer the kind of Islamicate legitimacy and credentials (for lack of better words) that we witness the Guru tacitly advocating for himself and his Sikhs in the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, an authenticity which delved back into the ancient history of Iran, a history which the Mughals whose family included members named after many of the famous personnel of the *Shāh-nāmah* readily identified. It is perhaps to foster such Islamicate credentials that Guru Gobind Singh's court, unlike that of his neighboring Rajput rivals, patronized Persian literature. It is to these claims that the next chapter will eventually turn.

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5

The Sikh Shāh-Nāmah *of Guru Gobind Singh*

همایون همما اوج تکمیل را
درخشنده مه اوج تفضیل را[1]

[Guru Gobind Singh is] the blessed *humā* [wielding/granting] the loftiest authority. He is the brightly shining moon, of limitless excellence.

ALL THESE SPECULATIONS regarding authorship notwithstanding, there is little doubt that eighteenth-century Sikhs knew that the Guru had sent some kind of letter or missive to the emperor rebuking the latter's conduct as word of such a letter had spread throughout the oral narrative-scape of eighteenth-century Punjab and beyond very soon after the Guru's death in 1708 CE and perhaps earlier.[2] Under the loving hand of contemporary and later Sikh authors and scribes, as we have made clear, the letter's very journey to the emperor becomes a story unto itself, an arduous *sevā* undertaken by no less than Bhai Daya Singh, the foremost among the *pañj piāre*, or Five Beloved Ones first initiated into the Khalsa order on that fateful day in 1699.[3] He may well be the "representative" (*vakīl*) to whom our Persian chronicler 'Inayatullah Khan refers in the *ḥasbulḥukm* discussed above. Although Sainapati has the tenth Guru encourage Daya Singh to take a number of Khalsa Sikhs along with him as travelling companions,[4] later accounts go so far as to include the four other members of the Panj Piare as Daya Singh's escorts despite the strong tradition that claims that at least three of these five (Bhais Himmat Singh, Muhkam Singh, and Sahib Singh) were killed in the Battle of Chamkaur, thus even further enhancing the letter's prestige. Manuscript 59*b*, titled *Zafarnāme Bāre* (Pertaining to the *Zafarnāmā*) and held by Guru Nanak Dev University makes this rather explicit:

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ਜੋ ਕੋਈ ਸਿਖ ਪੜ੍ਹੇਗਾ ਤਿਸ ਨੂੰ ਸਿਖੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਬਖਸੇਗਾ। ਮੁਕਤ ਪ੍ਰਪਾਤ ਹੋਤੀ ਹੈ। ਜਨਮ ਮਰਨ ਤੋ ਰਹਤ ਹੋਤਾ ਹੈ। ਦਇਆ ਸਿੰਘ ਸੋਢਤੀ ਲਹੌਰ ਦੀ ਵਾਸੀ। ਮੁਹਕਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਛੀਬਾ ਦੁਆਰਕਾ ਦੀ ਬਾਸੀ। ਤੀਜਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਾਈ ਬਿਦਰ ਦੀ ਵਾਸੀ। ਧਰਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਹਠੀਲਾ ਜਟ ਸਿੰਘ ਹਸਤਨਾਪੁਰ ਦੀ ਵਾਸੀ। ਪੰਜਵਾ ਹਿਮੰਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਝੀਵਰ ਸਿਖ ਜਗਨਾਥ ਦੀ ਵਾਸੀ ਏਹ ਪੰਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਖਤ ਲੈ ਕੇ ਔਰੰਗੇ ਪਾਸ ਗਏ।[5]

The Guru will bless any Sikh who reads this text with [a firm faith in] Sikhism. That Sikh will obtain liberation and cast off the cycle of existence. Daya Singh was a Sobhti Khatri, a resident of Lahore. Muhkam Singh Chhiba resided in Dwarka and the third [Sikh,] a respected [member of the Nai caste,] was Sahib Singh Nai [who] resided in Bedar. Dharam Singh was a Haṭhīlā Jat (or "an obstinate Jat") of Hastinapur and the fifth [member of this party] was Himmat Singh, a member of the Jhivar caste of Sikhs (or "a Sikh watercarrier/fisherman") and inhabitant of Jagannath [Puri in Orissa]. These five Singhs took the letter and went to Aurangzeb.

In the end, however, only Bhai Dharam Singh remains mentioned alongside Daya Singh.[6] That hearsay regarding the Guru's *Ẓafar-nāmah* circulated may thus be easily assumed. To this day, objects and stories associated with the Gurus, especially with Guru Gobind Singh, form a vibrant part of Sikh networks worldwide.[7]

With these limitations in mind, therefore, let us take the internal evidence of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* on its own merit. As an account of the Sikh past, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* in many ways continues the narrative that seems to abruptly end in the thirteenth chapter of the *Bachitar Nāṭak*.[8] Although the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is not in the typical Brajbhasha of the majority of the Dasam Granth's compositions and eighteenth-century Sikh texts, its format is not altogether dissimilar from the *gur-bilās* literature of this period, particularly the *Bachitar Nāṭak* as both works are in the first person: it interweaves divine praises and Sikh teachings with narratives of the Guru's battles and wanderings, and affectionately crafted images of the tenth Guru, who is portrayed as the righteous foil to the (mostly) wicked Aurangzeb (see particularly *bait*s 106–10), who, for the most part, is cast as the anti-Guru, an opposition or inversion that orients much of the action found within the text and helps structure its narrative. To this end, the author employs images from the animal kingdom to frame both the Guru and Aurangzeb: the Guru is protected by the legendary

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humā (of which more in a moment) while Aurangzeb is cast as the crow—an image with many negative connotations in the Adi Granth, as a bird that croaks wisdom but within which dwells greed, pride, and impurity;[9] the Guru is the lion (perhaps an indirect reference to the title Singh), the emperor the goat, the sheep, and the deer, which lack the grandeur and power of the king of beasts.[10] Discursively and metonymically, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* thus reverses the actual relationship between the emperor and the Guru. Here the Guru reigns supreme while the emperor has fallen from his position of authority.

The image of the Guru that we discover here, moreover, although manifesting Sikh understandings of the tenth Master and his relation to the Divine, is also quite Islamicate in nature, drawn principally from the *Shāh-nāmah*. Note for example *Ẓafar-nāmah* 95, which calls to mind Esfandyar's assertions of his prowess to Rostam in Ferdausi's masterpiece:

منم کشته ام کوهیان بت پرست که او بت پرستند و من بت شکست"

I, too, have fought against the hill chieftains (*kūhīyān*, "hill-men") [who] venerate idols. As they are idol worshippers, so I am the idol-breaker.

But most telling in this regard is *bait* 16, to which I made reference above:

همارا کسی سایه آید بزیر بر و دست دارد نه زاغ و دلیر"

Anyone who comes under the shadow of the *humā* cannot be grasped by even the craftiest of crows.

The next *baits* make clear the implicit idea here, that Guru Gobind Singh himself has been "touched" by the shade of the *humā*, the mythic Islamicate bird that does not just bless—as virtually every English and Punjabi translation of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* suggests[13]—but more significantly grants sovereignty to all those who come into contact with its shadow, a common trope in Persian poetry since the time of Ferdausi and which in India was particularly associated with the mythology surrounding Mahmud of Ghazni (under whose patronage the *Shāh-nāmah* was written)—and a symbol we also find within both the *Ḥikāyats*[14] and the writings of the Guru's Persian poets.[15] For this reason, fortified with the grace of the True Guru, the tenth Guru and many of his Sikhs escaped Anandpur and Chamkaur and for this reason as well, the text implies, the first course of action the Guru undertakes afterward

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while he is still being pursued by Mughal soldiers is to confront Aurangzeb as an equal, a sovereign himself, loudly echoing attitudes we infer from within the final chapter of the *Bachitar Nāṭak*:

ਸਰਬ ਕਾਲ ਰੱਛਾ ਸਬ ਕਾਲਾ । ਲੋਹ ਰੱਛ ਸਰਬਦਾ ਬਿਸਾਲਾ । ਢੀਠ ਭਯੋ
ਤਵ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਲਖਾਈ । ਐਂਡੋ ਫਿਰੋ ਸਭਨ ਭਯੋ ਰਾਈ ।[16]

The All Destroyer protects me, always; the One who pervades all protects me as the sword (*loh*). Through your mercy upon me, all fear is gone. I conduct myself with pride and have become the king (*rāī*) of all.

The focus of this sovereignty here is of course the divine, and given Guru Gobind Singh's particularly poignant identification with the story of Seyavash, who is the symbol of innocence destroyed, simultaneously encompassing both the Guru and his children (and may also metaphorically treble as the tenth Guru's father), which was noted in our discussion of *baits* 76–80, the *Bachitar Nāṭak* passage above, in the context of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, calls to mind the Iranian prince's preference to be a much less worldly king than his father:

جهاندار یزدان پناه منست زمین تخت و گردون کلاه منست[17]

The Lord who protects the world is my refuge; the earth is my throne and the revolving heavens my crown.

These are sentiments with which Guru Gobind Singh and the later authors of the *gur-bilās* literature would most certainly agree, the latter forcefully ascribing such an outlook to the tenth Sikh Master. And as just such a *rāī*, the tenth Guru chooses to convey his standing as well as his admonition and advice, his concerns and his request through a vehicle that regularly appears within the *Shāh-nāmah* and often produces dramatic results, the versed letter.[18] *Baits* 59–60 (among others) firmly buttress this equality as within these the tenth Guru offers the emperor "safe passage" should he visit the Guru, assuring a protection that, let us recall, Aurangzeb's representatives perfidiously denied the tenth Master and his Sikhs:

که تشریف در قصبه کانگر کند وزان پس ملاقات باهم شود
نه زره درین راه خطره تراست همه قوم بیرار حکمی مراست[19]

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If your Highness visits Kangar then we can both meet there; there will be no danger whatsoever [to you] as the people of Berar are under my command.

Although there is some controversy in regard to these two *baits*, whether originally mouthed by Aurangzeb or the tenth Guru himself, I am of the opinion that these are penned as the Guru's own words. If this were not the case, one could easily argue that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* would ultimately have originated as a note of accusation with no suggestion of a resolution, which seems to me unlikely. That these are the Guru's words may be fathomed from Mughal documents dated April 1705 that note that Aurangzeb had dispatched Chin Qalich Khan to deal with "the accursed Berads," a statement that clearly demonstrates the infidelity of the Berars toward the Mughal emperor.[20] That the Berars of Kangar cherished a fondness for Guru Gobind Singh is very much implied in the tenth Guru's own *hukam-nāmā*, dispatched to the Sikh sangats of that region, dated October 1706.[21] These *baits* may be understood as a testament to the sovereignty of Guru Gobind Singh and thus, by extension, the independence of his Sikhs, a theme tacitly implied within the Adi Granth[22] and a matter regularly reiterated in eighteenth-century Sikh literature (and also symbolically implied in the *ammrit sanskār* ritual) as these authors and the contemporary Panth of the eighteenth century attempted to grapple with the death of the Guru and the end of human Guruship in the context of the loss of Anandpur.[23]

I suggest in this light that the *humā* couplet above may be understood as foreshadowing the controversial *bait* 61, which may be taken to relate Guru Gobind Singh's implicit rejection of an offer which Aurangzeb had apparently presented the Guru in order to have him and his forces evacuate Anandpur: induction and incorporation into the Mughal system of *manṣabdārī*. This is, of course, a strategy developed by Emperor Jallaluddin Akbar but of which Aurangzeb made abundant use throughout his long reign, especially after he had shifted his court to southern India in 1682 CE to deal with matters there.[24] In my understanding of this *bait*, the tenth Guru is here reminding the emperor of the words that Aurangzeb had earlier written to the Master of Anandpur:

یکی اسپ شائسته یک هزار بیا تا بگیری بمن این دیار[25]

Your title will be one thousand horse if you come to this area and meet me.

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One the one hand, the Guru's dismissal not only demonstrates resistance to Mughal power but may also be a rejection of the type of *manṣabdārī* court culture that so animated the cultural and political concerns of rival local and transregional Rajput courts, which, as we have seen, jockeyed for power among themselves and others by broadcasting their alliance to or antipathy toward the Mughal emperor and his court through the classical and vernacular literatures patronized by their courtiers, courtiers who most likely held the Mughal standard with its fondness for Brajbhasha *rīti* and *praśasti* literature as the ideal.[16] On the other hand, this dismissal also once again makes the implicit claim of collective sovereignty for the Sikhs as the Guru (and by extension the Khalsa) refuses to take on what in the circumstances could only have been a subimperial title. This *bait* thus reinforces claims already presented within the eighth and thirteenth chapters of the *Bachitar Nāṭak*. It may also add weight to the contention that the *sanad* mentioned at the beginning of chapter 1 was issued by the tenth Guru.

In this context, therefore, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is also fulfilling a teleological purpose (alongside its tautological one) in explaining and enhancing the idea that the Guru and by extension his Sikhs assumed sovereignty from perhaps the mid-to-late seventeenth century under the auspices of the young Guru Gobind Singh, well before the evacuation of Anandpur and thus prior to the writing of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*: as Aurangzeb had violated his rights to sovereignty through his oath-breaking (made all the more dramatic by reference to the *Shāh-nāmah*) and the execution of both the tenth Guru's father and sons, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* makes a point of ensuring that we know the Guru would never ever break such an oath sworn before the divine (metaphorically speaking):

قسم مصحف خفیه گر این خورم نه فوج عزیزم را سم افگنم[17]

If I had taken [just such] an oath upon the Qur'an falsely I would not have incapacitated my dear soldiers.

The end implied here, therefore, is not the characteristic one we often see in most Indian hagiography, the perfection of the saint, but rather it is the perfection of empire in the person of Guru Gobind Singh, who achieves such empire through the perfection of self, a perfection recognized not only through his birth to the earlier Sikh Master but also both in his adherence to divine oaths and his refusal to accept incorporation into the compromised

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substance of the emperor Aurangzeb by consenting to a noble title in the latter's equally compromised empire.

In almost all cases in the epistle, it is by these very titles—which the author of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* has the tenth Guru reject in my reading of the text—that particular individuals are noted. Within the *dāstān*, these allusions are thus as veiled and indirect as the earlier-noted reference to the Prophet Muhammad. This is particularly so in regard to the emperor, whom Indo-Timurid Persian epistles rarely deign to suggest by name and title. Instead, following the extravagant standards set by Abu'l Fazl in his beloved chronicle, we are always presented with a wide variety of epithets and allusions to both living and dead Indo-Timurid *shāhanshāh*s in Mughal literature, the latter of whom are strictly and respectfully called by their posthumous titles.[28] Of course, the author of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* does likewise in what would commonly be understood as a play upon an emperor's name in Persian poetry (*ihām*):

شهنشاه اورنگزیب عالمین که دارائی دوراست و دوراست دین[29]

The *shāhanshāh* of all things on earth; the ornament of the throne (*aurang-zeb*) who [possesses] the wealth of the age, but is [nevertheless] far from faith.

All eighteenth-century readers or listeners, Sikhs included, would have understood this to be an ambiguous reference to Aurangzeb.[30]

Clear citations there are, however. Apart from that to Ferdausi in *bait* 80 noted earlier, the only other figure mentioned by name is the Mughal soldier Nahar, who confronted the Guru on the battlefield of Chamkaur. The reference appears in *bait* 29:

چو دیدم که ناهر بیامد بجنگ چشیدن یکی تیر من بی درنگ[31]

When I saw that Nahar [Khan] came out to battle he was instantly struck by one of my arrows.

The Nahar here mentioned is most likely Aurangzeb's general, Nahar Khan, an Afghan soldier of Malerkotla. According to the *Akhbār-i Darbār-i Mu'allā* dated, interestingly enough, the 11th of Muharram during the 46th regnal year of Aurangzeb (corresponding to June 1702), Nahar Khan was a general with a mansab rank of 3000/1000, which may well have been raised by the time of the Battle of Chamkaur.[32] Other Mughal nobles and soldiers who find

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space within the epistle remain unnamed, sometimes indicated by title alone: the powerful Afghan soldier mentioned in *bait*s 31–33 who so wreaks havoc among Sikh forces until he himself is killed; the cowardly *khwājah* of *bait*s 34–35; the emperor's "promise-breaking" commander of *bait* 45;[33] the emperor's *qazi* of *bait* 56; and finally the hill chieftains of *bait* 95. More importantly, we have the dishonest *bakhshī* and *dīwān* of *bait* 14 right at the beginning of the *dāstān*.[34] This intriguing *bait* merits some further consideration.

We have made passing reference to the contention that Aurangzeb was only indirectly involved in the siege of Anandpur and the subsequent Mughal violation of the Quranic oath to provide the Guru and his Sikhs safe passage after evacuating the town. The basis for this, at least from the point of view of a number of scholars, is the fourteenth *bait*, which has the Guru state:

نہ قطرہ مرا اعتباری بروست کہ بخشی و دیوان ہمہ کنب گوست"

I have not the slightest of trusts in [your pledges] since everything the *bakhshī* and *dīwān* said were lies.

Once again, the author may here be exercising his poetic license as Melikian-Chirvani suggests in his take on the couplet.[36] The *bakhshī* and *dīwān* were the most senior officers of the Mughal state, responsible for the financial and martial administrative departments within Mughal bureaucracy, and a reference to them was an allusion to the empire itself and to the emperor Aurangzeb himself who both appointed and controlled these men and their offices.[37] Later eighteenth-century Sikh writers such as Sainapati, as we shall note, easily picked up upon this point. Since the time of the emperor Akbar, the imperial *bakhshī* and *dīwān* most certainly affixed their seals to many Mughal documents both financial and martial.[38] "The nature of State business transacted in the office of the *bakhshí al-mamálik* and his assistant *bakhshís*," claims Momin, "shows that the department had the control over the entire service of the Empire. Every order passed through his office, and most of the grants and appointments . . . were particularly concerned with that office."[39] Certain certificates required both *bakhshī* and *dīwān* to affix their seals.[40]

Could the emperor's own *bakhshī* and *dīwān* have affixed their seals to a copy of the famous Quranic oath (presented, as the text itself implies and some traditions hold, within a copy of the Qur'an) or personally spoken to the Guru or his representatives at Anandpur? Although well beyond the prescribed duties of both the imperial *bakhshī* and *dīwān*, such is of course

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possible. It is worth keeping in mind however that the presence of such high-ranking imperial officers most certainly serves later Sikh interpreters well: to come under their direct notice and that of the emperor loudly proclaims the Guru's extraordinary significance to later Sikh listeners and buttresses the sovereign image of the Gurus we find lovingly crafted within the *gur-bilās* and *janam-sākhī* literature, not to mention that same image we note later in the *Ẓafar-nāmah* itself. For the author of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, this image stands out the most profoundly: it is, after all, the imperial *qazi* who makes his way to the Guru with Aurangzeb's letter in *bait* 56—perhaps the sworn oath which some scholars consider to be the emperor's response to the *Fatḥ-nāmah*—and assures the Guru that the emperor would maintain his pledge of free passage.[41] The stronger likelihood though would be that the seals and signatures of the provincial rather than imperial *bakhshī* and *dīwān* validated the oath.

There is some circumstantial evidence to support this claim. First, it was to the provincial administrators that the pahari rajas would address their concerns regarding the Guru's alleged activities at Anandpur. These complaints would have been directed to the governor (*sūbahdār*) or deputy governor (*nā'ib sūbahdār*) himself or to his senior-most representatives, the provincial *dīwān* or *bakhshī*.[42] The man appointed *dīwān* of the Punjab during Aurangzeb's 48th regnal year (December 1703–December 1704 CE) was none other than the Mun'im Khan earlier noted in the *ḥasbulḥukm* of 'Inayatullah Khan.[43] It was during the following year (1705 CE or the 49th regnal year) that Mun'im Khan was further promoted, appointed deputy-governor of the Punjab at that time, the title by which he is referred in the *ḥasbulḥukm*.[44]

Although the predominant duties of the *bakhshī* were to oversee the Lion's Share of the subah's military expenditure, there are certainly instances within the long history of Mughal bureaucracy when both the imperial and provincial *dīwān* assumed financial and military responsibilities. Perhaps the best known example of such a *dīwān* was Akbar's famous finance minister, Raja Todar Mal.[45] Through the office of the provincial *dīwān*, therefore, documents dealing both with matters financial and martial passed for approval by the chief financial officer. When we consider the Guru's resources at Anandpur and the fact that Mun'im Khan was especially sent an imperial order commanding him to treat the Guru well on his journey southward, the possibility of his direct involvement with the court of Anandpur seems strong. As the *dīwān* of Punjab, Mun'im Khan would certainly have known of the seizure of the Guru's goods,[46] a likelihood that may have prompted the emperor to command that these be used to help cover the tenth Guru's traveling expenses to the imperial court.

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The *Ẓafar-nāmah* also devotes *baits* to the kind of joint praise of the Sikhs that we find in the earliest of the *gur-bilās* works, *Gur Sobhā* and its successors (very much unlike *Gur Sobhā*, however, the term Khalsa, surprisingly, appears nowhere in our Persian text). Although the many references to Guru Gobind Singh's devotion to the Lord may also be taken by extension to apply to those warriors under his command, it is in the act of battle that the Sikhs merit particular attention. The account of the Battle of Chamkaur begins with a rhetorical question:

گر سنه چه کاری کند چهل نر که ده لك بر آید بر و بی خبر[47]

What could a small number of starved men do when an army ten lakhs strong attacked without warning?

The answer is, of course, a great deal as the next twenty or so *baits* make clear. When we see what these "famished forty" and their Guru could do under the Eternal Guru's guiding hand the result is a battlefield that runs red with the blood of the dead and wounded, the ground colored as the red tulip, the *gol-e lālah*, a simile often encountered within the *Shāh-nāmah*.[48] Here, then, we find another opposition: Aurangzeb's near-infinite resources against those few of the Guru, a dichotomy that also helps situate the narrative and that we hear at length in the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s closing *baits* (105–11). Let us be clear that the tenth Guru in no way desires to fight, but fight he and his Sikhs must when such action is forced upon them by the treachery of the combined Mughal and pahari forces (*baits* 18, 20–22).[49] This will become the typical way in which Sikhs will understand themselves and their reactions to armed struggle and violence, playing into and enhancing ideas already present in such notions as *mīrī-pīrī*, believed to have been first articulated by Guru Hargobind, as Bhai Gurdas implies.[50] The final *bait* narrating the battle (*bait* 41) likewise ends with the same rhetorical question as *bait* 19, bringing to a close that particular segment of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* (although *bait* 44 briefly reintroduces the battle in the context of the theme of divine protection, which is implied throughout) and adding a particular texture and depth to this document to which both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sikh and Mughal audiences would be particularly sensitive (the latter perhaps more so). This is a glorious testament to Sikh mettle in both battle and in devotion to the one Lord, and suggests that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was purposefully crafted as a Sikh *Shāh-nāmah*, the text (or at least the most endearing portions of it) that supplies the mythic, historical, and the moral

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template for the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s author and that most certainly accounts for the author's particular choice of meter and format.[31]

As we have noted, allusions to the *Shāh-nāmah* go well beyond the Sikh expertise in battlecraft. Melikian-Chirvani claims these to be echoes; but these reverberate profoundly and so often that they do far more than simply echo. A good portion of the entire *dāstān*, for example, appears much like Kavah the blacksmith's extraordinary personal confrontation of the evil Arab king Zahhak (the maternal ancestor of Rostam, Iran's champion), who was previously snared by Iblis or Satan. In this, a scene Dick Davis notes in his masterful study of the *Shāh-nāmah* which is suffused "with a sense of emotional outrage and triumph,"[32] Kavah articulates the horrors that Zahhak has inflicted upon the people of Iran generally and on himself specifically. Not only has Kavah lost all but one of his eighteen sons to the Arab shah's evil appetites[33] (a reference which may have been intended to haunt the Guru's letter to the emperor as the tenth Master too had lost his sons, apparently to just such devouring inclinations on Aurangzeb's part),[34] but Zahhak's episode also articulates perhaps the most important theme that runs throughout Ferdausi's dense epic: how do wise champions and men of integrity (such as Faridun in the Zahhak installment) remain loyal to a king who has lapsed into evil ways, who is corrupt and unjust?

For Ferdausi, the answers to this question are many, and it is the consequences of these that he narrates throughout: Faridun with the help of Kavah leads an insurrection, imprisons Zahhak, and is himself crowned king; Sam supports Manuchehr's ill-tempered son, Nozar, despite the petitions of Nozar's own tyrannized warriors; Seyavash holds true to his oath to the Turanian ruler, abandons his beloved Iran and his foolish father/King Kavus for a breach of courtly etiquette, and becomes the protégé of Afrasiyab, who later has him killed; Esfandyar obeys his jealous father/king Goshtasp without question and is killed unwillingly by Rostam; Rostam is in turn forced against his better judgment to kill the prince of the kingdom he has sworn to defend, which ultimately leads to his own death at the hands of his stepbrother Shaghad and that of his family by Bahman, Esfandyar's son; and so on and so forth. Certainly, the author of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is indirectly asking this very question of the Mughal emperor, whose past (of which the Guru was most certainly aware) was a checkered one, and, like him, is well aware of the fact that just about every king within the *Shāh-nāmah*—Shah Khusrau, the son of Seyavash, clearly stands out as the exception here as his integrity forces him to abandon the throne in fear of the hubris and corruption that absolute power engenders—is corrupt and/or corruptible (both in the case of Goshtasp, the

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father of Esfandyar) and that their ultimate fate is either abdication or a premature death (or permanent occultation in Zahhak's case). The Aurangzeb of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is painted with similarly conflicted colors, although unlike the monarchs of Ferdausi's text the possibility of redemption is left available to him.[55] No doubt this is an image and an option that would have escaped the attention of neither the emperor nor his courtiers.

In the end, such intertextual resonances to the *Shāh-nāmah* make it clear that the author of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is suggesting that not only Aurangzeb himself but his entire empire is threatened by the emperor's lapse into evil ways, his injustice and his oath-breaking—which is of course not only a breach of courtly protocol and the annulment of manliness, but also disobedience to God as far as the *Shāh-nāmah* is concerned[56]—in much the same way that similar lapses on the part of Iran's many kings, which we find described within the *Shāh-nāmah*, threaten to destroy the entire nation of Iran. As Ardeshir advises his son Shapur, "The throne of kings is endangered by three things," the principal one of which is the monarch committed to injustice.[57] Such behavior diminishes the *farr* or "luminous God-given glory" that exists within all the great, powerful, and legitimate emperors within Ferdausi's epic, the light that was also generally believed to shine within the Indo-Timurid Mughal emperors.[58] And so the Guru tells Aurangzeb,

شناسد همین تو به یزدان کریم نه خواهد همین تو بدولت عظیم[59]

> The generous Lord knows you and wants you not [to continue] to possess this extraordinary bounty (*daulat-i ʿaẓīm*, i.e., the empire).

We may also here recall the double allusion to Iraj and Seyavash in *Ẓafar-nāmah* 80. Ultimately in both of these cases of innocents killed, the guilty party is annihilated by the successors of these two stalwart champions, Manuchehr and Kai Khusrau respectively.[60]

The allusions to the Zahhak installment notwithstanding, it is clear that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* saves its most important intertextual reference for two of the four most poignant, interconnected episodes of Ferdausi's epic: the murder of Iraj by his brothers Salm and Tur and the tragic death of the innocent Seyavash killed by Afrasiyab through the machinations of the latter's treacherous brother, Garsivaz, both of which we have already encountered. It is however possible that the Guru is also alluding to the other two episodes as well, namely the battle between Rostam and his son Sohrab (as Christopher Shackle has claimed), and that between Rostam and Esfandyar,[61] as in these

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Shāh-nāmah installments one of the important threads that runs throughout is the twofold question of honor and morality (another has to do with fathers hearing of their sons' death, alluding perhaps to the Guru's recent loss of his four sons)—and, from these two, of supporting the claims of conscience and being true to one's pledge and one's self even at the risk of death.[62] The protagonists within these episodes, in other words, were the very opposite of the *paimān-shikān* or "oath-breaker" noted in the Guru's epistle, and none of these episodes stand out as brightly within the *Ẓafar-nāmah* in this regard as Seyavash, whose chapter within the *Shāh-nāmah* is the one to which the Guru directly alludes in *bait* 80, as we earlier saw.[63] The regular passages on staying true to one's oaths in this episode are mouthed both by Seyavash and Rostam (Iran's prince and champion respectively) in the hope of ensuring that Kai Kavus does not breach courtly etiquette and execute the hostages sent by Afrasiyab, all of whom Seyavash has sworn to protect. Rostam says to Kavus:

و دیگر که پیمان شکستن ز شاه نباشد پسندیده نیک خواه[64]

Those who regard the king highly will not look well upon the shah who breaks his oath.

While a number of lines afterward, Seyavash says to Bahram and Zangah after receiving Kavus's angry reply to Afrasiyab's peaceful overtures:

و زین گونه پیمان که من کرده ام بیزدان چه سوگند ها خورده ام
اگر سر بگردانم از راستی فراز آید از هر سوئی کاستی[65]

This oath which I have sworn before God is binding, if I turn from the righteous path calamities shall befall from every direction.

The adherence to oaths is not the only theme we discover, however, for underlying all four of Ferdausi's tales (if not the *Shāh-nāmah* as a whole) is a keen critique of monarchy itself (quite a surprise to those of us accustomed to the pre-Iranian Islamic Revolution interpretation of the *Shāh-nāmah*)—although not a cry for its displacement, as monarchy was the only style of government with which both Ferdausi and the Guru were familiar—and a skepticism of those very values often associated with stories of battle and traditional images of heroism.[66] This is a cynicism which the Guru's *Ẓafar-nāmah* most undoubtedly shares: the truly heroic victor in the tenth Guru's epistle is not the most powerful though morally compromised king, but rather those

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less seemingly powerful men and women whose integrity is never brought into question, who both give and take oaths seriously and as such have the might of the divine as their sword and shield:

اگر بر یک آید ده و ده هزار نگهبان اورا شود کردگار[67]

The Creator (*kardgār*) becomes the guardian of him/her [who serves the Lord] should ten thousand plus ten men attack this one alone.

It is this style of heroism, moreover, which Guru Nanak and his successors most often laud within the hymns of the Adi Granth[68] and in many cases it is also such bravery that populates the many accounts of Sikhism's pantheon of selfless martyrs.[69] So commanding is the image of the *Shāh-nāmah* and so profound the stories of its respective tragedies that there are the rare alternative recensions of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* that include *bait*s close to the end of the epistle further referencing Ferdausi's epic text, couplets that we only discover today within the accepted version of the *Ḥikāyats*. The inclusion of these may further demonstrate the oral dimension of the tenth Guru's epistle.[70] The relevant passage appears below, *Ḥikāyat* 8:41–45, commenting upon the transience of existence in language that for the most part (the few exceptions being quite transparent) is drawn clearly from the Iranian epic. Here Guru Gobind Singh speaks in a way that is quite reminiscent of the heroine Gordyah, the sister of Bahram Chubinah, who in a very famous passage criticizes her brother's decision to rebel against the treacherous king, Hormozd, and seek the crown for himself. In this instance, she is one *kah ay az garānamāyagān yādgār*,[71] "who brings to mind the worthy [Iranian] heroes [of the past]:"

ببین گردش بی وفای زمان که خون ستادش نه ماندش نشان
کجا شاه کیخسرو و جام جم کجا شاه آدم مهمد ختم
فریدون کجا بهمن اسفندیار نه داراب دارا درآمد شمار
کجا شاه اسکندر و شیر شاه که یک هم نغانده است زنده به جاه
کجا شاه تیمور و بابر کجا ست همایون کجا شاه اکبر کجا ست[72]

Look at the world's fickle turn: no sign of the blood of [the noble] Seyavash (*Sitādash* here) remains. Where is Shah Kai Khusrau and where the [all-seeing] Cup of Jamshed? Where is Adam, [the first] ruler?[73] [Even the Prophet] Muhammad [came to an] end (*khatm*). Where are Faridun, Bahman, and Esfandyar? Neither Darab nor

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> [his son] Dara (Darius) [remain]. Such departed rulers are countless. Where are Alexander [the Great, Dara's son] and Sher Shah [Suri]? Not a one of these great kings has continued to live. Where are Timur and Babur? To which place have the emperors Humayun and Akbar gone?

Let me here add that this passage, which likely alludes to a scene drawn from the denouement of the Rostam and Esfandyar story, the narrative to which earlier, as we have already speculated, the Guru indirectly referred,[74] seems completely out of place as the extremity of the respective *ḥikāyat* in which it is found (a story which is clearly reminiscent of the more tricky situations we find in the *Pakhyān Charitr*, in this case of a princess killing her children to entertain a paramour),[75] but it does fit nicely at the end of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* proper as it completes a binary theme that permeates many episodes of the *Shāh-nāmah* dealing with the prerequisites of kingship, whether most attention should be paid to one's *honar* (talent)—Aurangzeb's skills in this instance, which the author narrates for the most part in *Ẓafar-nāmah* 89–94—or to one's *gauhar* (genealogy, an aspect of reputation), which is underscored here through the references to the Pishdadid, Kayanid, and Achaemenid dynasties of the *Shāh-nāmah* through to the Timurids of recent memory, and further extended to the Indo-Timurid Mughal line from which Aurangzeb is himself descended.[76]

The fit is made all the more snug when we consider that there is a further allusion tucked into the first *bait* of the passage above that allows for an ambiguous reading of *Ḥikāyat* 8:42–45, which disconnects the emperor Alamgir from his famous pedigree, namely the "sign of the blood of Seyavash." On the one hand, the reference to Seyavash is perfectly clear, yet on the other, within the *Shāh-nāmah*, the *khūn-i seyāvash* has a fructifying ability, which Afrasiyab himself recognizes when he cautions his minions to avoid dropping the prince's blood on the ground lest the blood of this martyr seed opposition to him. Unfortunately for the Turanian shah, they fail to completely prevent this:

> ز خاکی که خون سیاوش بخورد به ابر اندر آمد درختی ز گرد[77]
>
> From that dusty ground which has absorbed the blood of Seyavash immediately sprang forth a tree.

The tree here is the sign or *nishān*[78] of *Ḥikāyat* 8:41, namely the birth of Seyavash's son, Khusrau, through whose very veins flows the *khūn-i seyāvash*.

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It is undoubtedly Khusrau who is the wisest of the fifty Iranian monarchs noted throughout the epic, the shah who is subsequently mentioned in the following *bait* (8:42). The fact that Khusrau alone is mentioned twice in succession should alert us to the author's overriding concern. Kai Khusrau, like his father before him, likewise battles his conscience in the attempt to follow the proper and most ethical course available to a ruler, remaining true to himself. Seyavash rejects Iran when his father Kavus commands him to violate his oath to Afrasiyab, while Khusrau ultimately rejects to rule overall, when he is (with the promptings of his conscience and the divinely sent angel Sorush) confronted with the perils of absolute power. He too thus rejects Iran to ensure he remain uncorrupted—a course made all the more dramatic by the protests of his famous minister and king in his own right Zal, the father of Rostam—and simply disappears on the top of the mountain, at the bottom of which apparently Zahhak is imprisoned. That Aurangzeb holds such power, the passage seems to imply, inevitably assumes the emperor's own corruptibility and ultimately that of his empire, based as it is on power and pelf, a persistent theme of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. The author of what is today *Ḥikāyat* 8:41–45 makes quite clear that the ethical nature of rule embodied in Khusrau is visibly absent in the person of Aurangzeb, who fails to recognize his own corruption (and perhaps further future corruptibility) and that of his representatives, clearly disconnecting Aurangzeb and his empire from the deeds of the glorious Kayanid lineage narrated within Ferdausi's epic. The author appears to go a step beyond even this, though, by severing the emperor from his more recent Indo-Timurid Mughal lineage, an understanding one achieves when reading the *baits* following through *ihām*. The focus in this case seems not to be only upon the transience of existence but also on the nature of rule. Where has the apparent integrity that marked the reigns of Babur, Humayun, and Akbar gone (*kojā ast*)? the poet seems to be asking (note that neither Jahangir nor Shah Jahan—as earlier antagonists of the Sikh Gurus—are included in this roster). Such virtue is altogether absent in the rule of Aurangzeb, a reign in which not a drop of the *khūn-i seyāvash* remains. In many ways, the condemnation of worldly courts and power as opposed to that divine, dharmic rule of the tenth Guru that informs later *gur-bilās* literature is very much reminiscent of the conflicted nature of rule with which Ferdausi deals in the *Shah-nāmah*'s Khusrau narrative.

In such a light, it seems clear that these regular (and not so regular) allusions to the *Shāh-nāmah*, the almost-transparent intertextuality between the *Ẓafar-nāmah* and Ferdausi's epic in other words, act as a lens through which the history of the tenth Guru's last years are refracted and

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ultimately remembered, likening and equating the Guru's forced evacuation of Anandpur and his subsequent battles and the deaths of his innocent children and mother to the events of those familiar and poignant tragedies played out by the great heroes and characters of the Iranian epic, and it is through this coalescence and its intertextual resonance that meaning is disclosed. This intertextual dimension of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, simply put, "reworks and repeats patterns found in other texts…which themselves draw from a 'common pool' of ideas, motifs, and values;"[79] materials of the heroic ages noted within both Islamicate and Indic traditions, within the *Shāh-nāmah* as well as the Mahabharata and Ramayana, which are mapped onto the "microheroic age" of the Mughal period.[80] But it does not end here as the tenth Guru's reworking not only recasts the epic, but in the process appropriates the *Shāh-nāmah*.

And so we may in fact go so far as to modify our earlier claim. This was not merely a Sikh *Shāh-nāmah*, but rather a new *Shāh-nāmah*, not supplanting the original of course but rather refashioning the epic to suit the purposes of its author: that is, conceiving the Battle of Chamkaur and the traumatic evacuation of Anandpur of which the battle was a harrowing corollary as an actual recurrence, a repetition of the most powerful episodes narrated within the *Shāh-nāmah*. The tenth Guru and his Sikhs are the principal shah in this *Shāh-nāmah*. Let us recall that this letter was intended for a courtly Mughal audience (of one to be sure, the emperor, but an audience nevertheless). In so appropriating the *Shāh-nāmah*, an important cultural text within the royal court and among Mughal nobles, the author is disturbing the tranquility of the relationship this courtly society claims with this work, and in the process disinvesting the Mughals and their supporters of the symbolic Islamicate capital endowed within this treasured book and reassigning it to the Guru and his Sikhs, alienating the Mughals from their memory of this text and thus creating a sense of discontinuity with their Islamicate past. It is the sword that is the *Ẓafar-nāmah* that rends the Mughal association with Ferdausi's epic. The *Ẓafar-nāmah* may thus be also understood as the tenth Guru's victory over the Mughals in the battle over the cultural claim to the *Shāh-nāmah*, perhaps prefiguring Sikh conflicts over similar cultural capital in the eighteenth century.[81] Indeed, the Guru and his Sikhs may be likened to Khusrau, as unlike the vast majority of the fifty rulers of whom we hear in Ferdausi's epic they too collectively embody the righteousness of rule, a point of which we are regularly reminded in eighteenth-century Sikh literature.

Such a transferal of symbolic capital allows us to recognize the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s thematic continuity with other texts within the Dasam Granth, particularly the *Bachitar Nāṭak* and those supporting works included with the

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larger *Bachitar Nāṭak Granth*. In these interconnected texts, Guru Gobind Singh is personally situated within an Indic lineage of gurus, kings, and avatars as a new type of king and (if I may) an anti-avatar avatar (per the *Bachitar Nāṭak*'s condemnation of those who believe the tenth Guru as an avatar—*Bachitar Nāṭak* 6:32), one who succeeds where all the previous others have failed. Similarly, in the *Ẓafar-nāmah* (albeit in a much less explicit way) the tenth Guru is also positioned within a literary lineage but one which is predominantly drawn from Islamicate sources, the most significant of which is the *Sh̲āh-nāmah*. Here too the tenth Guru achieves success and victory.

But this act of appropriation also serves as a metaphor of appreciation, in Wendy Doniger's terms,[82] in the sense that the Islamicate *Sh̲āh-nāmah* is transfigured into the Sikh *Ẓafar-nāmah*, perhaps underscoring the appeal of the Sikh tradition in suggesting that the tenth Guru and his Sikhs could effortlessly participate in the cosmopolitan world of the eastern Islamicate. To this we may add that the epistle may also have provided the tenth Guru a way of presenting the Sikh tradition to the Mughals, a Sikh tradition as envisioned by its present Guru. Such a strategy was no doubt necessary in order for the Mughals to recognize that the Sikh tradition had value. The *Ẓafar-nāmah* seems to thus supply a "counterhistory" or "counterepic" to those of Alamgir's chroniclers[83] and most likely a "countermemory" to those accounts produced in the courts of the pahari rajas, one which simultaneously extends the history of the Guru and his Khalsa into the cherished Islamicate past of ancient Iran.[84] Appropriating the Persian imperial traditions within the *Sh̲āh-nāmah* would have provided the tenth Guru an effective way to further legitimize Sikh rule in Anandpur and the Sikh claims on this patrimony against those of the pahari rajas and perhaps even against those of the Mughals themselves, further underscoring the Guru's own sovereignty and equality with the emperor as well as the epistle's markedly defiant, though respectful tone.[85]

This poetic text which is at once political and sacred, manifesting a "political poetic," gives rhetorical shape to the power and authority of the Guru and by extension that of the Sikhs,[86] a power which does not portray concrete reality, as it is clearly difficult to forget that the tenth Guru is writing the *Ẓafar-nāmah* after he has been deprived of virtually everything material in his life, his family, his poetry (lost as he was attempting to cross the Sirsa River according to tradition), and his ancestral dominion, Anandpur, the patrimony over which he reigned;[87] but it does reveal a supremacy that does discursively, poetically, morally, and aesthetically supplant that of the Mughals. Such power is no doubt enhanced when we recall the claim that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* may have tautologically actuated the very victory in its title (or

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that it was designated as such only after it had generated its victory). There is thus an interesting symmetry here between the Adi Granth in its capacity as the Guru Granth Sahib and the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, a balance to which we have already alluded: while the former stands for the living Gurus and their ideology, which is Gurmat, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is the poetic shape of the tenth Sikh Guru's sovereignty and by extension that of Sikh sovereignty, asserting it through a political Persian poetic aesthetic commonly understood within the Mughal court: the assertion of dominion in a moral and aesthetic territory with a very sharp sword indeed (i.e., the *Ẓafar-nāmah* itself), in the context of the loss of swords and power over actual territory.[88] This affirmation of power may perhaps account for the fact that so many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *Ẓafar-nāmah* manuscripts exist. Certainly such texts would have been revered not only for the belief that these were originally penned by Guru Gobind Singh but also because these may have helped foster and perpetuate the idea among Sikh chieftains, their vassals, and other Sikhs of the later eighteenth century that the disciples of the Guru were sovereign, an idea which one finds repeated not only within the *gur-bilās* literature, but also within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Persian chronicles as well as the earliest European accounts of the Sikhs,[89] my earlier comments about the apparent place of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* within eighteenth-century Sikh history notwithstanding.

Clearly, the intertextual appropriations of the *Shāh-nāmah* which we recognize in the Guru's letter would have resounded among a Mughal nobility who were from an early age taught to view Ferdausi's epic as one of the principal texts of the Persian canon, containing powerful themes and representations of courtliness and manliness, of etiquette and honor, of heroism and weakness. These were stories, it bears noting, that were not only read but most likely heard and performed by storytellers and minstrels at the Mughal darbar, stories that were understood as predominantly historical, as vignettes of a shared past, let us add:[90] since at least the time of Akbar, storytellers and storytelling accompanied by minstrels was a common practice at the Mughal court.[91] Through these intertextual resonances, the author of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* enabled just such an audience, a predominantly Persianized Islamicate audience, let us recall, whose collective and cultural memory and whose identities and understandings of personhood were shaped and molded in part by reference to Ferdausi's seminal text,[92] to experience the Guru's plight as well as Aurangzeb's deceit in a particularly powerful, dramatic, and perhaps visceral way.[93] Certainly, as we have seen, Mughal emperors themselves as well as Mughal chroniclers, Abu'l Fazl in particular, often compared the deeds of

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past Timurid and Indo-Timurid emperors to those performed by the beloved characters of the *Shāh-nāmah*, which may well have inspired the tenth Guru to write his epistle in just such a *Shāh-nāmah*-esque style,[94] comparisons that as we have noted one discovers well beyond the Mughal sphere of influence. Unfortunately, we cannot actually tell how this epistle was received by the emperor Aurangzeb or his Mughal courtiers (if at all) since no evidence to this effect is extant despite the later claims of Sikh tradition, but the author's intent does seem apparent.

It seems likely, moreover, that Persian-knowing Sikhs would have also had a similar experience. That at least some Sikhs did remember and ultimately memorialize the Sikh past generally and perhaps the evacuation of Anandpur and the Battle of Chamkaur specifically in this way, as a repetition or refashioning of certain events narrated within the *Shāh-nāmah*, is brought forth by a suggestion we discover within another of the compositions attributed to Guru Gobind Singh's foremost poet and disciple, Bhai Nand Lal Goya.[95] In the *Joti Bigās*, a Persian work with a Brajbhasha title ([The] Light [of God] Effulgent) that probably predates the evacuation of Anandpur, Nand Lal speaks of the many mythical Iranian heroes (in an incarnational sense, no less) who are ready to selflessly serve Guru Gobind Singh, echoing sentiments we also hear within both many of the hymns of the Adi Granth and the later *gur-bilās* literature. Here we see clearly the reassigning of the symbolic Islamicate capital of which we spoke earlier:

هزاران کیومرث و جمشید و زار کمر بسته بر خدمتش وار
هزاران چون رستم هزاران چون سام هزاران چون اسفندیارش غلام[96]

> There are thousands of [ancient Iranian kings like] Kayumars and Jamshed and [thousands] like Zal (Rostam's father, the king of Sistan or Zavolestan),[97] [all] standing at the ready in his [i.e., the Guru's] service. There are thousands like Rostam and thousands like Sam (Rostam's grandfather); there are [equally] thousands of Esfandiyars [who] are his servants.[98]

The *Ẓafar-nāmah* may thus be understood as a text that, like the *gur-bilās* works which reference it, portrays an indigenous Sikh understanding of the past in much the same way as the *charitrs* I spoke about in an earlier study.[99] While the Brajbhasha *charitrs* draw upon Sanskrit Puranic and epic texts in

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their pursuit of a "history" (as does perhaps the most Puranic of the *gur-bilās* texts, Kesar Singh Chhibbar's *Bańsāvalī-nāmā*), in the case of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* the grand narrative or master story that underlies and informs its concrete retelling of the past is the *Shāh-nāmah*.[100] Simply put, the references to the *Shāh-nāmah* make the events of Chamkaur more meaningful and powerful by making these immediately resonate with the values and ideals of the Mughals themselves.

Such an awareness of the past against a grand narrative as mentioned above allows us to couple the *Ẓafar-nāmah* with another work that likewise narrates Sikh interpretations of the past, though clearly not drawn from Ferdausi's extraordinary text but rather from Indic courtly literature as well as older Indic sources, particularly the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and the Puranas.[101] It seems clear that despite the fact that they are composed in different languages, the *Bachitar Nāṭak* and the *Ẓafar-nāmah* are closely related.

The *Bachitar Nāṭak* as it stands today ends at its fourteenth chapter, which forms a closing invocation to the divine thus paralleling the chapters we find at the beginning of the Wonderful Drama.[102] The thirteenth is a crucial one in my opinion as it forms the end of the *apnī kathā* or My Story narrative, which begins in chapter six. What makes the strongest claim for the Guru's authorship of this text is the fact that the narrative ends just here, in 1696 right after Prince Mu'azzam (later Bahadar Shah) makes his way into the Punjab. Chapter thirteen does provide a valid end to this narrative, whether originally intended or not, as we here see the Indo-Timurid recognition of the Guru's authority.[103] This suitable ending notwithstanding it would have most certainly been in the interest of the Guru's Sikhs to continue the narrative beyond 1696, a simple fact that goes some way to demonstrating that the true author of the text is Guru Gobind Singh himself. After all, eighteenth-century Sikh literature lovingly fills in the numerous gaps in the Guru's life we find in the *Bachitar Nāṭak* narrative, his childhood as well as his post-1696 life.[104] Another factor within the *Bachitar Nāṭak* that also supports the claim that the tenth Guru is the author is the caution to those disciples who would suggest that the tenth Guru is an avatar of the divine or the divine itself. The pits of hell, the narrative suggests, are the fate that awaits such people.[105] In the light of the later *gur-bilās* stress on the tenth Guru's avatar-esque qualities (which as Purnima Dhavan makes clear demonstrates the rather flexible nature of Khalsa identity as envisioned by the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors of the *gur-bilās* and *rahit-nāmā* literature, necessary in order to ensure that the Khalsa appealed to as wide a base of people as possible in

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this rather uncertain period),[106] this feature also makes a point of the Guru's apparent authorship since it tends to run counter to subsequent hopes and expectations.

As we noted above, implicit within the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is the claim of the Guru's sovereignty and thus by extension that of the Sikhs. The *Bachitar Nāṭak* ends with the Guru's recognition by the state while the *Ẓafar-nāmah* portrays the Guru's attempt to engage the state diplomatically as an equal. Certainly, the number of diplomatic treatises that had been written by his court poets suggests that Guru Gobind Singh was more than familiar with the arts of diplomacy.[107] This familiarity extends to Mughal-period literary arts as well, particularly other genres of courtly literature. Both the *Bachitar Nāṭak* and the *Ẓafar-nāmah* were composed during a time that saw a series of similarly constructed historical narratives emerge, in Brajbhasha poetry and verse, especially among Rajput bards who attempted to underscore their patron's claims to legitimacy and high ranking through pedigree and talent. Attention was given to such detail in the light of the increasing resolve on noble descent as Rajput groups competed among one another in service to the Mughal court,[108] exacerbated perhaps by the Mughal attention to the genealogy of administrative families.[109] Certainly, we see all this emphasized within the *Bachitar Nāṭak* as well, whose early chapters narrate the battles of Lav and Kush, sons of the idealized Hindu king Rama, from whom the Bedis ("reciters of the Veda" and the *zat* into which Guru Nanak was born) were descended, a descent that is then traced through the nine previous Sikh Gurus, ultimately through to the Sodhis and Guru Gobind Singh himself.[110] The *Bachitar Nāṭak* does, however, clearly differ from the Rajput chronicles noted above as within the Guru's text there is no attempt whatsoever to demonstrate Sikh loyalty to the Mughal emperors (although there is certainly a recognition of Timurid sovereignty). The *Ẓafar-nāmah* extends this *apnī kathā* narrative into the early eighteenth century, further emphasizing the sovereignty implied within the *Bachitar Nāṭak*. This is no doubt something that those later Sikhs of the Amritsar Khalsa Divan who advocated the sacred status of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* realized, and so its inclusion within the Dasam Granth, a text that may have been considered a part of the Sikh canon during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[111]

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6

The Historiography of the Ẓafar-nāmah

ਸੁਨਿ ਪ੍ਰ ਸੰਨ ਹ੍ਵੈ ਗੁਰੂ ਉਚਾਰਾ । ਬਿਨਾਂ ਸ਼ਸਤ੍ਰ ਹੀ ਸ਼ੱਤ੍ਰੂਨਿ ਤੁਮਰੀ ਜਿਹਵਾ ਹੀ ਖਗ ਧਾਰਾ । ਜਿਹਠਾਂ ਨਿਕਸੈ ਬਾਕ ਤੁਹਾਰਾ । ਆਯੁਧ ਤੇ ਤੂਰਨ ਕਰਿ ਪਾਰਾ ।੪

ਜੀਤਹੁ । ਕਿਸ ਤੇ ਚਿੰਤਾ ਹੋਇ ਨ ਭੀਤਹੁ ।੪

The Guru was delighted by their reply and said, "Even your tongue holds the sword. At whichever place your word is uttered, it will have as immediate an effect as a weapon."

Even weaponless you defeat [your] enemies. You will fear no one nor worry about anything.

LET US FOR the moment turn toward Anandpur. As we have made clear throughout these chapters, the writing of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was a consequence of the tragic, forced evacuation of the Sikhs and their Guru from Anandpur in 1704 or 1705 and all that had followed immediately afterward, respectively the Battle of Chamkaur and the deaths of the Guru's mother and four beloved sons, the *chār sāhibzāde*, among other events.[3] Anandpur, let us recall, was the town in which the tenth Guru most often resided (1672–85 and 1689–1704/5), the town in which his wife, Mata Jito, exercised a particular interest in the domestic welfare of the town's inhabitants and, it appears, acted as patron to its artists and poets in some cases,[4] and the town around which he had built his five fortresses. As such, it was into Anandpur that the tenth Guru, his darbar, and his Sikhs had invested their most potent social, cultural, and symbolic capital[5] and in which the disciples of the Guru both

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proximate to and distant from the town had projected their emotional assets: not only was Anandpur the town built upon the foundations established by Guru Tegh Bahadar, the town around which Guru Gobind Singh symbolically incorporated sites previously considered sacred through his patronage of these, the place where the Guru had written a number of his famous compositions,[6] and the town in which the tenth Master had selected the Panj Piare and founded the Khalsa, the martial order so lovingly lauded in the later works of the *gur-bilās* authors especially Sainapati's *Gur Sobhā* (allowing the town to ultimately acquire the sobriquet *Khālse dī vāsī*—dwelling of the Khalsa), but it was at Anandpur that three of his sons were born, Zorawer Singh, Jujhar Singh, and Fateh Singh, and at Anandpur that, at least according to tradition, Guru Tegh Bahadar was met by the delegation of Kashmiri brahmans, a meeting which ultimately decreed the ninth Master's tragic fate.[7] It is finally the strengthening of the refuge that is Anandpur that the tenth Guru mentions in the *Bachitar Nāṭak*.[8] With such in mind it is no wonder that Guru Gobind Singh spent the last two years of his life dealing with both Aurangzeb and Bahadar Shah in his attempt to retrieve what he undoubtedly felt was his ancestral inheritance, his "home," tied to a set of very significant Sikh memories both joyful and tragic.

For at least the last two centuries, therefore, Anandpur and the fort of Kesgarh have been *yādgār*, a term which literally means "invested with memory" though it is generally understood as "a memorial"; or perhaps better yet, these sites have both been *yādgāh* or "memory-place(s)," a word that improves upon the term *yādgār* as the suffix *-gāh* invokes both space and time, thereby suggesting the porous, fluid, and thus contested nature of such spots, sites at which both memory and history intersect. I have chosen the *yādgāh* construction as this is the closest Punjabi equivalent I can think of to Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, "memory sites/realms."[9] This particular *yādgāh*, like its French *lieux de mémoire* counterparts, constantly served and continues to serve as a storehouse of community identity; as Nora defines it,

> a *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community...[10]

Anandpur's existence as a *yādgāh* is clearly emphasized within both the Sikh Ardas (indirectly here as one of the five takhts) as well as the *khaṇḍe dā amrit* ceremony (also known as *khaṇḍe kī pāhul* or *ammrit-sanskār*) of

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Khalsa initiation. After the initiate has been sprinkled with the water of the double-edged sword within the contemporary ritual, for example, he or she is told by one from among the Five Beloved Ones that

> ਜਨਮ ਆਪ ਦਾ ਕੇਸ ਗੜ੍ਹ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦਾ ਤੇ ਵਾਸੀ ਅਨੰਦਪੁਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਹੋ ।[11]
>
> [From this point forward] your birth place is Kesgarh [the principal fort in Anandpur] and your place of residence is Anandpur

and that

> ਤੁਸੀਂ ਪਿਛਲੀ ਜ਼ਾਤ-ਪਾਤ, ਜਨਮ, ਦੇਸ, ਮਜ਼ਹਬ ਦਾ ਖਿਆਲ ਤਕ ਛੱਡ ਕੇ ਨਿਰਮੋਲ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਬਣ ਗਏ ਹੋ ।[12]
>
> You have become a pure Khalsa and must cast aside any regard for your previous caste, birth, country, and religion.

This ceremony then ritually *re-members* the Sikh to Anandpur, uniting the new Khalsa and Anandpur, and in the process recreates the primal moment of initiation in 1699 and the happy memory of that event and, somewhat distantly, of those less happy events that were a consequence of its fall, collapsing temporal distance and recreating the fluid memory of it in an intimate way. But distance is also spatially distorted, so much so that every locale in which the Khalsa initiation ceremony takes place becomes an Anandpur, a symbolic Anandpur replacing the actual Anandpur that the Sikhs had lost during that fateful December. The Khalsa is thus united to the site, to the tenth Guru, and to the Panj Piare in both time and space and granted their sight or *darśan* through memory. And one may add that this union doubtlessly continues symbolically through the very body of the Khalsa Sikh, the "total body"[13] that reaches its ritual and physical/sartorial zenith through the *khaṇḍe kī pāhul* ceremony, which makes mandatory the observance of the Five Ks and the injunction to not smoke: purity within, sanctity without. Such memories as those associated with the "myth of the Khalsa," which includes the primal site of Anandpur, "continue," as Giorgio Shani has recently made clear, "to resonate with Kes-dhari Sikhs everywhere because they are *embodied* in the 'Five Ks.'... The body thus functions as *memory*, reminding the Sikh that he... 'was born in Kesgarh and lives in Anandpur'" [emphases in the original].[14]

The longing to return to Anandpur after its loss, to perhaps a time and a (now-imagined) place that was more simple and free, stable and heroic, and

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spiritually pristine, was doubtlessly keenly felt (and still is by diaspora Sikhs) and may be judged from the highly optimistic prophecy we find repeated regularly throughout the penultimate chapter of Sainapati's *Srī Gur Sobhā*, a text completed very soon after the death of the tenth Sikh Master:

ਭਲ ਭਾਗ ਭਯੋ ਤੁਮ ਤਾਹਿ ਕਹੋ ਗੜ੍ਹ ਆਨੰਦ ਫੇਰਿ ਬਸਾਵਹਿੰਗੈ ।[15]

> Good fortune will befall [us] as you say to him, "We shall once again establish Anandgarh fort."

Such prophecies of future Khalsa rule are regularly repeated throughout both the *rahit-nāmā* and *gur-bilās* literature and may well have been prompted by the message of Sikh sovereign rule, which resonates throughout the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, making credible the belief that the sword of rule was passed on to the Sikhs by the tenth Guru, a common couplet cast onto Sikh coins from the time of Banda Bahadar onward.[16] As such, the memory of the sacred landscape of Anandpur is evoked and invested with a strong emotional and symbolic appeal, allowing successive generations of Sikhs, particularly Khalsa Sikhs, to "mediate their cultural myths by inculcating them with their desires [through this *yādgāh*]" in Lawrence Kritzman's words, reading the past through the cultural and historical context of an individual's and/or community's present.[17] Such claims prompted Sikh writers such as the Udasi Sikh Sukkha Singh to relocate to Anandpur as he made his pilgrimage to spots associated with the tenth Master.[18] There is thus little doubt that a strong Khalsa Sikh presence has been inscribed and is regularly reinscribed onto the very space that is Anandpur.[19] The city itself, like the first ritual of *khaṇḍe dā amrit*, which it hosted—at least according to Sainapati's *Srī Gur Sobhā*[20]—is a nostalgic reminder of Sikh rule by the tenth Guru and his Khalsa for however brief that initial rule was, and so a means of resistance to the authority of the Mughal Empire specifically and all non-Sikh empires generally,[21] a point we clearly perceive within the later *gur-bilās* literature and sometimes distinguish in the statements of the most famous (or infamous) twentieth-century Sikh resistor, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.[22] It is no surprise that in the early 1970s, Sikh politicians decided not to gather at Amritsar, where one discovers the first Sikh manifestation of political authority, the Akal Takht, but rather to gather here at the so-named town of bliss and title their demands the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in an attempt among many others to resist the Indian Nation State's branding of Sikhs as Hindus, something we read within Article 25 of the Indian Constitution.[23] As such, it is easy to assume

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that as a form of resistance the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, itself a *yādgāh/lieu de mémoire*, is a literary counterpart to both the city of Anandpur and the *khaṇḍe kī pāhul* ritual: it both affirms Aurangzeb's sovereignty—it is, after all, sent to him as a rebuke and as an indirect request for redress—as well as resists it by underscoring the equality and the sovereignty of the Guru and his Sikhs both rhetorically and aesthetically, both directly and indirectly.

Although the *khaṇḍe kī pāhul* initiation ceremony today is very much located in the time of the Singh Sabha and Chief Khalsa Diwan, the appeal of Anandpur to Sikhs appears to stretch back to the very time of the last Guru and perhaps before. We may well assume that by the 1690s, the grandeur and importance of the town among Sikhs had achieved an almost-mythic proportion seconded only by its economic significance to the region.[14] This sheer reverence we read in the resounding praises of Anandpur found within the court poetry of the tenth Guru's many *darbārī kavis* or court poets. Hans Ram Bajpei, for instance, provides an *anandpūr-varṇana* or description of Anandpur in his *Karna Parab* (a Brajbhasha interpretation of the chapter of the Mahabharata dealing with Karna, the first son of Mother Kunti):

> ਚਾਰ ਬਰਨ ਚਾਰੋ ਜਹਾਂ ਆਸ਼੍ਰਮ ਕਰਤ ਅਨੰਦ । ਤਾਂ ਕੋ ਨਾਮ ਅਨੰਦਪੁਰ ਹੈ ਆਨੰਦ ਕੋ ਕੰਦ ।[15]
>
> This is the place where (*jahān*) the four varnas [come] from the four [directions]; it is the ashram that delights. To it has been applied the name Anandpur, the root of bliss.

A similar *māhātmyā* may be heard in the work of Pandit Devi Das in his *Siṅgh Gaū kī Kathā* (The Story of the Lion/Singh and the Cow/Poorman/Village), likewise written in the Guru's Anandpuri darbar:

> ...ਅਨੰਦਪੁਰਿ ਪਾਇਓ ਬਾਸ ਆਵਾਗਉਣ ਨ ਹੋਇਗਾ ਮਿਟ ਗਈ ਜਮ ਕੀ ਤ੍ਰਾਸ ।[16]
>
> having obtained a home within Anandpur transmigration will cease to exist and the fear of death will be destroyed.

Although it was very much in the interest of those poets who were patronized by the tenth Guru to describe the town's grandeur, the descriptions here tend to focus on the spiritually liberating qualities of the Guru's patrimony. In the courtly setting in which these texts were composed, such glorious descriptions

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redound both to the Guru's honor as well as to that of his Sikhs. Early Khalsa *rahit-nāmās* also allocate a particular reverence to Anandpur and Kesgarh as the birthplace of the Khalsa, perhaps best noted in the *rahit-nāmā* attributed to Daya Singh, our erstwhile courier:

> ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਨੰਦਪੁਰ ਦਰਸ਼ਨ ਬਿਨਾ ਕੇਸਗੜ੍ਹ ਜੀ ਕੇ ਦਰਸ਼ਨ ਬਿਨਾ ਸਿਖੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਹੋਤੀ ।[27]
>
> Without taking *darśan* of either Anandpur or [the fortress] of Kesgarh you cannot obtain [knowledge of] *Sikhī*.

Its significance in the Sikh collective imagination and in its ability to help define what it actually means to be a Sikh, specifically a Khalsa Sikh, at any given time, both for contemporary and later Sikhs, simply cannot be underestimated.

It is for this reason that the forced evacuation of what was most likely understood to be the center of the Sikh Panth, Anandpur, and the apparently complete destruction of its five forts,[28] had what I see in retrospect as a traumatic effect on the Sikhs and the construction of Sikh history post–1704/5.[29] I would posit that it is through the trauma of the loss Anandpur that Sikh memories of this event, from among almost all past Sikh-Mughal interaction (with just a few significant exceptions), had been partially stabilized and to a large extent fixed.

Such an idea loudly resonates with those put forward in the path-breaking work of Jan and Alieda Assman. According to Assman, memory survives as trauma and that memory in turn is also stabilized through trauma.[30] His studies focus in this regard primarily on monotheism and its corollary iconoclasm and the trauma experienced by Jews in the production of these. Although by no means a perfect fit (I am somewhat at odds to find any repression in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century history of the Sikhs and, as we have seen, Anandpur is also tied to joyous Sikh memories), certain elements of this idea suggest some congruence in the production of Sikh history after 1705. It appears that is was through the trauma of Anandpur that collective Sikh memories of fierce Mughal persecution were roughly stabilized, and through this cracked lens that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is often read and future encounters between Sikhs, the Khalsa, and the Mughals cast.[31] Clearly, the Mughals had been the target of the Sikh court's indignation well before the loss of Anandpur in 1704 or '05, as the vilification of Mughals in Sikh courtly texts such as the *Vār Śrī Bhagautī jī kī* and especially *Pakhyān Charitr* 404 (which was likely completed sometime

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around 1696 CE) makes clear.[31] But as there also exist courtly sources that take a more sympathetic view of north India's rulers, the most significant of which is the *Bachitar Nāṭak* although we may also include here various *charitr*s within the *Pakhyān Charitr*, we may say with some certainty that the image had not yet become constant.

When we turn to eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Sikh literature, however, the constancy is there; the impression one receives in these works is that within the Punjabi environment, for the most part, a Muslim threat to the Sikhs lurked behind every corner. Kesar Singh Chhibbar, for example, most certainly incorporates this overtly hostile attitude to Muslims in his blanket assessment of Islam:

> ਛਲ ਕਰਨਾ ਤੁਰਕਾਂ ਦਾ ਧਰਮ ਹੈ। ਮੁਹੰਮਦ ਭੀ ਕੀਤਾ ਏਹੋ ਕਰਮ ਹੈ। ਪਿਉ ਨੂੰ ਮਾਰਿ ਉਸ ਰਾਜ ਲਇਆ। ਅਰਬ ਦੇਸ ਦਾ ਰਾਜ ਸੀ ਭਇਆ।[32]
>
> Deception is the dharma of the Turks, a practice in which Muhammad also engaged. Muhammad killed his father and took his kingdom and so obtained rule over the Arab lands.

To this we may add Koer Singh's early nineteenth-century *Gurbilās Pātśāhī Dasvīn*, which is perhaps the most vitriolic early nineteenth-century text in regard to Muslims generally (*pace* Surjit Hans who claims that this is in fact a "Muslim friendly" text)[34] and the Mughals in particular—who are often referred to as Turks in the text.[35] This accounts for a "cultural memory" of Aurangzeb and the Mughals that aligns well with the most severe excesses of later Orientalism, captured well in Jadunath Sarkar's five-volume opus, *History of Aurangzib Mainly Based on Persian Sources*. These propositions are difficult to imagine, their regular emphasis notwithstanding, given the fluid nature of the Punjabi landscape in which Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs had lived side by side for centuries. Persian literature noting the history of the eighteenth-century Sikh *misldār*s makes it quite clear that this antipathy did not manifest itself in *realpolitik*.

The traumatic effect of the loss of Anandpur may sound surprising when we consider that the Sikhs had just previously lost Guru Tegh Bahadar to the executioner's blade. Sikh accounts of the ninth Guru's murder, however, are coded as martyrdom and as such these emphasize pride, fulfillment, and victory over oppressors rather than trauma. The same may be said of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* itself. After all, this is a letter pointing to a significant victory in the face of grave defeat, the victory in question being not only the tenth Guru's moral

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stance but as well his very survival against what must have appeared to be overwhelming odds (the survival allowed him to pen the letter, let us recall).

Of course, when we turn to contemporary sources dealing with these interactions, we find the picture is a much more complex one. The relationships if you will between the Mughal emperors and their representatives and the Sikhs and Sikh Gurus were sometimes amiable and at other times bitter; they were, however, always multifaceted. The emperor Akbar's visit to Guru Arjan, for example, seems to have gone off well enough despite the fact that Guru Arjan had purposefully set some of his hymns and those of the other Gurus to the tune of popular folk ballads in which the emperor and the Mughals were the antagonists,[36] and little did Sikhs of the time know how dense this interaction with nobility would become with Akbar's successor Jahangir. Although the emperor Jahangir has today carved himself a special niche in the demonology of the Sikhs as the principal force behind the execution of Guru Arjan, something of which we hear in both the emperor's memoirs, the *Jahāngīr-nāmah*, and the near-contemporary *Dabistān-i Mażāhib*,[37] at the same time within this latter source we are also told of Guru Hargobind's friendship at best, service at worst, between him and the son of Akbar (about which Sikh literature today is often conspicuously silent), hints of which we also discover in later Sikh literature.[38] After the sixth Sikh Master's release from Gwalior prison, the pseudonymous author of the *Dabistān* mentions that Guru Hargobind not only often accompanied the emperor Jahangir but did likewise with the latter's son, Shah Jahan,[39] who would in November 1643 CE award Dhir Mal, the elder grandson of Guru Hargobind, a revenue-free grant.[40]

When we turn to contemporary references to Aurangzeb, the picture is equally complex and shifting, almost kaleidoscopic: he is praised directly in the *Pakhyān Charitr* as well as indirectly within, of all sources, the *Bachitar Nāṭak*, the end of whose fifth chapter narrates the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadar by the Mughal emperor.[41] The image within the *Ẓafar-nāmah* accords well with these. It is in other words not so static. In fact, there are *baits* in which surprise is expressed at (we assume) Aurangzeb's less-than-honorable actions on the part of the epistle's author, a shock that would no doubt have been absent were Aurangzeb's reputation for deviousness as well entrenched in early Sikh tradition as later Sikh authors (and others) make claim. Note for example *bait* 24:

ندانم که این مرد روباه پیچ مگر هرگز این ره نیارد به هیچ[42]

I did not know (*nadānam*) that this man is as devious as a fox. Otherwise this path [of armed conflict] would never have been adopted.

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Nadānam, "I *do* not know," the author claims, once again in a language reminiscent of the *Shāh-nāmah*,[43] switching to the present first-person singular tense to highlight this surprise. It would be this surprise that is lacking for the most part in the historiography of the beloved Guru's epistle. As we have implied, however, not all Sikh accounts embraced this antagonism without question. Certainly, the image of Aurangzeb is on the whole a despicable one, but the rare narrative survives in which the emperor does attempt to redeem himself in the light of the retrieval of the epistle.

I wish therefore to now turn to this, to how Sikhs understood the *Ẓafar-nāmah* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, assuming of course that contemporary written sources may be trusted to capture the epistle's appeal. The earliest written Sikh source to mention the letter was by one of the Guru's famous contemporaries, Sainapati, and was completed, according to Gurinder Singh Mann, shortly after the tenth Guru's death in 1708 CE rather than the generally accepted 1711 CE.[44] Titled *Gur Sobhā* (Radiance of the Guru), it is in its thirteenth chapter that we find the first narrative regarding the writing and delivery of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. This is a story that will continue with very little change for the next one hundred years as evinced by its retelling within both the *gur-bilās* and "lineage" literature, the *bańsāvalīs* and *gurpranālīs*.[45] Sainapati begins his account by telling us that after having been deceived by the Mughals and the pahari rajas at Anandpur and Chamkaur, the Guru decided to write an epistle to Aurangzeb to force him to come face to face with his own treachery (1–13). The Guru first summoned Daya Singh and explained the situation to him, asking him to collect a number of Sikhs and march down to southern India to hand the emperor this letter (14). Disguising themselves as Mughal soldiers (*ahadī*), the Singhs set off southward (15–16), traveling first to Delhi and then through a number of towns, all the while meeting up with local sangats (17–20) and visiting dharamsalas every dawn. Eventually they made it to the house of the Sikh merchant Bhai Jetha in Ahmadabad (*Ahmadā Nagar* in the text; 21) where they set up camp for a few days.

Sainapati then tells us that Bhai Daya Singh, unable to see Aurangzeb (later tradition claims Aurangzeb was ill; he was almost ninety years old, after all), becomes despondent and sends off a letter to the Guru in the hands of two couriers requesting help in securing a meeting with the emperor (25–30). The tenth Guru then asks the couriers to make all haste back to Daya Singh (29–30), after which he relates the contents of the letter (31–37) noting that he had himself desired to visit the emperor but was unable to do so because of the deceit in which all of the emperor's people engaged by breaking their trusts (33). Eventually, Bhai Daya Singh makes it into the presence of the

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emperor, who reads the letter and sends a mace-bearer off with the loyal Sikh, with his response to the Guru's petition, for the long and demanding return trip to the Guru (38–40). The arduous nature of the letter's journey makes its presentation all the more significant, enhancing the letter's prestige and importance. This journey would not end as the thirteenth chapter concluded, however. Bhai Daya Singh only meets again with the Guru at the beginning of the fifteenth after a difficult trek back home, and relays to him the news that Aurangzeb had died in Ahmadnagar.[46]

It is perhaps because the story of the letter's journey is so fraught with danger and so underscores the rare bravery and cunning of the Sikhs involved that it retains this basic outline to this day. Some interesting though minor changes and additions do, however, appear in later texts. Although Sewa Das's *Parchiān* and both Kirpal Das Bhalla's and Sarup Das Bhalla's *Mahimā Prakaś* texts all but ignore what I am calling the *Ẓafar-nāmah* narrative journey, it is taken up with much enthusiasm in Kesar Singh Chhibbar's account. In the *Bańsāvalī-nāmā*, for example, Chhibbar notes that Daya Singh (who is now the Guru's very accomplished *munśī* or scribe) made his way into Aurangzeb's presence dressed in blue clothes and disguised as a Hajji with a new copy of the Qur'an perched on top of his head which he claims was brought directly from Mecca (10:589–92), appealing to what many mid-eighteenth-century Sikhs most likely believed to be Aurangzeb's zealous religious instincts, an addition perhaps inspired by the regular references to the Qur'an in the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. But it is within the *Bańsāvalī-nāmā* that we once again become privy to an exchange between Bhai Daya Singh and Aurangzeb that first briefly appears in Sewa Das's *Parchiān* followed some years later by Kirpal Das Bhalla's *Mahimā Prakāś Vārtak*, a dialogue often reproduced in later *gur-bilās* literature, in which Aurangzeb asks the pious Sikh if the Khalsa has been created:

ਪੋਥੀ ਪੜ੍ਹਨੇ ਨਾਲਿ ਮੁੰਹੁ ਤੇ ਵਰਤ ਗਈ ਸਿਆਹੀ। ਓੜਕ ਪੜ੍ਹ ਕੇ ਤਿਨ ਐਸੇ ਕਹਿਆ ਪੰਥ ਤਿਸ ਕਾ ਹੋਵਤ ਹੈ ਭਇਆ ਦਇਆ ਸਿੰਘ ਕਹਿਆ ਹਜ਼ਰਤ ਹੂਆ ।[47]

> While reading the *pothī* [i.e., the Guru's letter] Aurangzeb's face went black. Having finally finished reading it the emperor asked, "Has this [new] panth [the Khalsa] come into existence?" Daya Singh answered, "Yes, majesty, it has."

In reply to which

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ਫੁਰਮਾਇਆ: ਈਂ ਰਾ ਕਤਲ ਮੇਕੁਨਮ ।[48]

[Aurangzeb] commanded [in Persian]: *īnrā qatl mīkonam*, "I will kill it."

This exchange in later works will become both more dramatic and more heated, and will ultimately demonstrate once again the independent sovereignty of the tenth Guru and his Sikhs and the power of the tenth Master and his glorious court. Such may be witnessed symbolically in the *Mahimā Prakāś Kavitā* (1776 CE). Terribly remorseful after becoming aware of how much suffering he has caused the tenth Sikh Guru, Aurangzeb voices a desire to meet him. To this end,

ਤਬ ਤਾ ਸਿਉ ਉਨ ਇਉ ਕਹੀ ਤੁਮ ਗੁਰ ਹੈ ਏਹ ਭੇਸ । ਸਜੀ ਤਰਫ ਦਾੜੇ ਬਿਖੇ ਇਕ ਧਉਲਾ ਹੈ ਕੇਸ ।[49]

[The emperor] then spoke to [Daya Singh] in this manner: "[Take] this attire [*bhes*] to your Guru. On the right side [of it] there is a single white hair from the hair of my beard."

This gifting is reminiscent of the ritual of robing ceremonies in which the emperor shares his person/substance with the grantee, symbolically incorporating him into his own person, a ritual that lay at the very heart of Mughal diplomacy. As far as such rituals are concerned, the most precious and desirable garments are those actually worn by the emperor himself, where contact with the emperor's substance is the most intimate, which seems to be the situation here. As such, the suggestion of the sovereignty of the tenth Guru is unmistakable and for Sarup Das Bhalla inevitable.[50]

This suggestion becomes far more explicit in later works, particularly the *gur-bilās* texts of both Sukkha Singh (circa 1797 CE) and Koer Singh as well as within both the *Sau Sākhīān* and *Sūraj Prakāś*, the latest of the *gur-bilās* texts (1843 CE), as Daya Singh (and his now-frequent companion Dharam Singh in certain later works) have entered into the august presence of the emperor and presented him with the Guru's letter. Here is Sukkha Singh's version of this entry:

ਸਭੈ ਲੀਨ ਚੀਰੰ ਸਜੈ ਅੰਗ ਆਛੈ । ਆਸੰ ਚਾਂਪ ਤੀਰੰ ਤੁਨੀਰੰ ਸੁ ਕਾਛੈ । ਦਿਪੈ ਬਿਬ ਰੂਪੰ ਗਯੋ ਤੋਨ ਜਾਏ । ਜਹਾਂ ਸਾਹ ਬੈਠਯੋ ਬਡੋ ਮੋਦ ਪਾਏ । ਲਖੈ ਰੂਪ ਯਾਕੋ ਰਹਾ ਬਿਸਮਾਈ । ਤਬੈ ਲਾਗ ਯਾਨੈ ਫਤੇ ਜਾ ਬੁਲਾਈ । ਸੁਨੈ ਵਾਕ ਊਚੈ ਰਹਾ ਨਾਦ ਪੂਰੀ । ਬੁਲਯੋ ਸਾਹ ਬੈਨੰ ਨਿਜੰ ਯੌ ਹਜੂਰੀ ।[51]

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> Daringly (*chīran*), he took the letter into the court (*sabhai*), his limbs adorned, graced with sword, bow, arrow, and quiver. So illumined, he went to where the emperor was sitting and greeted him very pleasantly. When the emperor witnessed his form he was amazed. [Daya Singh] then began to call out the Sikh [cry of] victory, [*vāhigurū jī kī*] *fateh!* [The emperor] heard the loud command filled with lasting sound. The shah summoned [him] and he himself spoke in the imperial presence.

Sukkha Singh is here inscribing a grandeur onto the body of the tenth Guru's beloved courier, creating a literary icon of Daya Singh, the Khalsa Sikh, which allows listeners and readers to effortlessly take *darśan* of this exemplar of the Guru's glory, a Khalsa Sikh ornamented in the martial symbols of the tenth Master, martial symbols which, let us remind ourselves, are associated with Akal Purakh as the defender of the righteous in the various compositions attributed to Guru Gobind Singh and which, Sukkha Singh states a score of lines afterward, were venerated as symbols of the tenth Guru and God during the eighteenth century, perhaps very soon after Gobind Singh's death.[52] This same reverence for weapons we discover in Kesar Singh Chhibbar's *Bańsāvalī-nāmā*[53] and many other examples of the *gur-bilās* genre, particularly Santokh Singh's *Sūraj Prakāś*, which situated just such veneration in the context of the festival of *navratrī* in which *śakti* is propitiated during the nine-day festival.[54] To this day, certain Sikhs, Nihangs particularly, continue to ritually venerate such weapons, especially within the temple complex at Hazur Sahib in Nanderh.[55]

But the passage also works on a more mundane level, one we perceive slightly more clearly in Koer Singh's condensed account of the initial meeting:

> ਪਾਂਚੇ ਸਸਤ੍ਰ ਅੰਗ ਛਕਾਈ । ਆਵਤ ਪਾਛ ਸਿੰਘ ਅਧਿਕਾਈ । ਸਸਤ੍ਰ ਸਹਿਤ ਵੜਨੇ ਨਹਿ ਦੇਹੀ । ਭਏ ਰੋਸ ਸੰਗ ਬੈਠਤ ਤੇਈ ।[56]
>
> [Daya Singh] had five weapons fastened upon his person and after him many Singhs came. They entered with weapons girded and did not give them away. They were seated with much indignation.

The resentment here on the part of the courtiers among whom the Sikhs were seated is warranted for at least two reasons: first, no noble, no matter how preeminent, was entitled to present a petition to the emperor directly, and second, only the most rare of nobles could enter the presence of the emperor

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armed, and even then only after permission from the emperor had been given.[57] In Mughal accounts of Bahadar Shah's reign, Persian chroniclers also pointed out the fact that the tenth Guru entered into the presence of the emperor with weapons upon his person (*bā yarāq amadah*), perhaps because Bahadar Shah recognized Guru Gobind Singh as both a leader and a saint,[58] perhaps faintly echoing the claim we discover in the tenth chapter of Nand Lal Goya's *Ganj-nāmah*.[59] Sainapati, writing very soon after the meeting between the tenth Master and Bahadar Shah, enhances this entry by painting a glorious picture of the Guru girded with shining weapons and courtly symbols while boldly making his way toward the throne, while in later *gur-bilās* accounts this recognition is taken a step further as even the representatives of the Guru come bearing arms, whether permitted or not.[60] There can be little doubt of the independence allocated to the Guru and his Sikhs here and their collective sovereignty, a point further elaborated in Santokh Singh's version of events.

ਕਰਜੋ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਂਵਾਂ ਸੁ ਅਗਾਰੀ । ਧਰਿ ਕੈ ਸ਼ਾਹੁ ਸਮੀਪ ਉਚਾਰੀ । ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਫਤੇ । ਕਹੀ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮੇ ਦਿਸ਼ਿ ਚਿਤੇ । ਪਰਵਾਨੇ ਕੋ ਕਰਿ ਅਗਵਾਈ । ਅਪਨੀ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਰਾਖਿ ਦਿਖਾਈ । ਸੁਨਿ ਪਿਖਿ ਕੈ ਅਵਰੰਗ ਚੁਗੱਤਾ । ਨਹਿ ਕੁਝ ਬੋਲਜੋ ਮਦ ਕਰਿ ਮੱਤਾ ।[61]

They presented the Guru's letter and having so placed it in front of the emperor they uttered [the Sikh battle cry], "*Vāhigurū*! Victory belongs to the Guru!" As they said this they looked toward and contemplated the written instructions [of the Guru thus averting their eyes from the emperor's person]. They came forward with the Guru's order (*parvānā*) thus demonstrating their commitment to *Sikhi*. Having heard and seen [the spirited Khalsa greeting] the Mughal emperor (*chugatta*) became stunned. Being in a haughty temper he did not say anything.

By failing to comport themselves in the prescribed manner while in the emperor's presence and purposefully averting their gaze to focus upon the letter of the Guru as his symbolic representation, Bhais Daya and Dharam Singh are clearly asserting the Guru's sovereignty and independence, their own independence and absolute loyalty to the Guru, and as well that of the collective Sikh panth.[62] This is the very prognostication that Santokh Singh elaborates a number of lines after these.[63] In Santokh Singh's early-to-mid-nineteenth-century environment, this was a very commonplace way of appreciating Guru Gobind Singh's continued dynamic presence

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among the Sikhs, in physical texts themselves and in the stories of his life as well as in the gatherings of sangats. As well we know, this twin doctrine of Guru Granth/Guru Panth ensures that Guru Gobind Singh is forever present among his Sikhs both in sprit and in history. This forms an interesting, multitextured corollary to Surjit Hans's well-known statement that "God enters into history with Guru Gobind Singh"[64]: Guru Gobind Singh here once again enters history through the text of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, allowing the latter to thus serve in a capacity much like the *malfūẓat* texts mentioned earlier. Within this same time period, moreover, the *Sūraj Prakāś* narrative goes some way in legitimizing Sikh authority and independence in the dawning colonial age, which Santokh Singh was himself witnessing, a period rife with internecine struggles after the death of Ranjit Singh (d. 1839). It is just a small step from the ideas implicit in this narrative to the eventual understanding of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* as *bāṇī*, sacred writ. Here the text itself stands in for the Guru once again allowing pious Sikhs to take *darśan* of their beloved master.

But let us now return to Sainapati for the moment. It is difficult to know beyond a doubt if the letter about which Sainapati is speaking is today's *Ẓafar-nāmah* despite the claims, both positive and negative, of later tradition.[65] We come some way closer to a positive assessment when we compare certain passages of Sainapati's text of the letter with particular *baits* from the Epistle of Victory itself. There are a small number of these that correspond. The famous passage about keeping one's word, for example, is echoed in *Gur Sobhā*, perhaps as a caution to Sainapati's contemporary Sikhs.

هم ون مرد باید شود سخنور نه شکمی دگر در دهانی دگر"[66]

A man should keep his word. He should not have something on his lips and something else in his heart.

ਸੁਖਨ ਮਰਦ ਕੋ ਜਾਨ ਮੈ ਜਾਨ ਰਾਖੇ । ਸੁਖਨ ਬੇਸੁਖਨ ਅਉਰ ਕੀ ਅਉਰ ਭਾਖੇ । ਦਿਲੋ ਜਾਨ ਸੇ ਕਾਮ ਕੋ ਜਾਨ ਕੀਜੈ । ਕਰੋਰੋ ਜ਼ਰੂਰੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਢੀਲ ਦੀਜੈ ।[67]

Know that a man must keep his promise (*sukhan*) to someone. A promise given should be kept. Know that the task [explicit in the oath] must be undertaken by heart or by life: it must certainly be done with no delay.

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As too is the *bait* regarding the horse mentioned above.[68] But whether Sainapati read the letter or not is not the point I wish to here make, although it is certainly possible he did. In the light of the evidence available, there is simply no way we can know the answer to this question.[69] What seems quite significant and compounds our ignorance is the fact that Sainapati only refers to the text throughout his account as nothing more than a "letter," *likhā*.[70]

The failure to name the text seems to indicate that for Sainapati and the other court poets within the tenth Guru's darbar what would eventually become the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was not particularly revered at the start; certainly it was worth mentioning in his *gur-bilās* account as it was written by the Guru (to whom Sainapati regularly refers as *kartār*, the creator), but as nothing more than a document that one ruler would send to another in the course of exercising their power. It is perhaps for this reason that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was not formally registered as a part of the Dasam Granth until later. I must add that such an understanding of this diplomatic letter may not have been true for all Sikhs generally who, it appears, did very much prize and revere even the succinctly written *hukam-nāmās* of their day.[71] As Christopher Bayly has noted in a slightly later context, the most highly valued and therefore revered papers were those written in the royal hand as these letters "were deemed to preserve the charisma of their writers," thus functioning in a way similar to that of the sovereign's/Guru's gifting of garments.[72]

Sainapati's particular view of the document was of course not to last for very long at all, especially after the "bibliocentric shift" that was Guru Gobind Singh's bestowal of guruship upon the Adi Granth, in which the book replaces the living Master.[73] There seems little doubt that with the death of the Guru in 1708, stories of his life and deeds, his teachings and hymns began to circulate dramatically throughout the then Sikh world, his physical passing securing their place ever more firmly within the popular Sikh imagination. It seems likely to assume, moreover, that physical objects belonging to the Guru, particularly texts attributed to him, not only traveled the length and breadth of India but were especially revered. To this day, *kathā* (homily) of the Guru's extraordinary life is still daily given by *kathākar*s worldwide. It seems likely that over time even the most mundane of things associated with the tenth Guru in his daily life would take on a new life so to speak.

In this light, therefore, it should elicit little surprise that within a year of the tenth Guru's untimely death we discover the appearance of a series of anecdotes concerned with his life, anecdotes, apparently, conveyed not by a Khalsa Sikh as one would expect but rather by an Udasi Sikh named Sewa Das. Long ignored by scholars of the Sikh tradition, in its time the

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Parchiān Pātiśāhī Dasvīn kī found a ready audience well into nineteenth century, as evinced by its influence on eighteenth-century works such as Kirpal Das Bhalla's *Mahimā Prakaś Vārtak* and Sukkha Singh's *Gur-bilās Pātiśāhī Dasvīn* and nineteenth-century Sikh texts like Koer Singh's *Gur-bilās Pātiśāhī Dasvīn* and the *Gurū kiān Sākhiān*.[74] Comprised of fifty *sakhis*, more than three-quarters of which deal with the tenth Sikh Guru, the *Parchiān* describes teachings and events in the Guru's life in a disjointed manner perhaps reminiscent of a *kathākar* providing a homily to a small group of gathered Sikhs.[75] There is one episode in particular that merits serious consideration in the context of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s origin and journey. This narrative, the thirteenth, modifies Sainapati's quite dramatically and will form the principal way of understanding the *Ẓafar-nāmah* itself and its history for the rest of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth, even though Sewa Das's *sākhī* does not follow the traditional sequence of events with which we are today familiar.

The *sākhī* in question begins with Guru Gobind Singh comforting the Sikhs who are distraught at the death of Guru Tegh Bahadar. The Guru then condemns the "Turks" responsible for his father's demise and for waging relentless campaigns against him and his Sikhs. *Turkon ko mārane kī vārī hamārī aī hai*, "My time to destroy the Turks is at hand" he claims, quite some time after which, Sewa Das continues, Guru Gobind Singh

ਤਬ ਖਾਲਸੇ ਕਉ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਹੋਆ ਜੋ ਚਲੋ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਜੀ ਤੁਰਕਾ ਸਾਥ ਜੁਧ ਕਰੀਏ ਅਰ ਤੁਰਕ ਕਉ ਮਾਰੀਐ। ਤਬ ਖਾਲਸੇ ਕਹਿਆ ਸਚੇ ਪਾਤਿਸਾਹ ਤੁਰਕ ਮਹਾ ਬੁਰਾ ਹੈ ਅਰ ਤੁਰਕ ਸਾਥ ਦਸ ਲਖ ਘੋੜਾ ਚੜਤਾ ਹੈ। ਆਗੇ ਜਿਉ ਰਜਾਹਿ। ਫਿਰ ਇਹ ਹੁਕਮ ਹੋਆ ਜੋ ਭਲਾ ਇਉ ਕਰਤੇ ਹੋ ਜੋ ਖਤ ਲਿਖ ਕੈ ਤੁਰਕ ਕਉ ਮਾਰਤੇ ਹੋ। ਹਮਾਰਾ ਖਤ ਪੜਕਰ ਮਰ ਜਾਵੈਗਾ। ਤਬ ਖਾਲਸੇ ਕਹਿਆ ਸਚੇ ਪਾਤਸਾਹ ਤੂੰ ਕਰਨ ਕਾਰਨ ਹਹਿ। ਜਿਉਂ ਤੈ ਭਾਵੈ ਤਿਉ ਹੀ ਕਰੀਐ। ਤਬ ਗੁਰੂ ਬਾਬੇ ਖਤ ਨਰਿੰਗ ਸਾਹ ਕੀ ਓਰਿ ਖਤੁ ਲਿਖਿਆ। ਖਤੁ ਕਾ ਨਾਮ ਜ਼ਫਰਨਾਮਾ ਰਖਿਆ।[76]

then commanded the Khalsa, "Go, battle the Turks and slay them." The Khalsa replied, "O true king, the Turks are very wicked and are accompanied by horsemen numbering ten lakhs. We will nevertheless obey your command." [The Guru] then said, "This is good. We will proceed in this way: a letter will be written to the [emperor of the] Turks [that] will kill him. When he reads this letter he will die." The Khalsa then said, "O true king, you are the doer of all things: that which pleases you comes to pass."

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> The Guru Baba then wrote this letter and addressed it to Aurangzeb. He titled it the *Zafar-nāmā*, the Epistle of Victory.

Here for the first time apparently we are finally presented with the name of the text, the Epistle of Victory.[77] An interesting title given the circumstances of the Guru's present situation, part of which Sewa Das has the Guru outline prior to the above passage. What type of victory does our author suggest here? The explicit victory here it appears is not, as contemporary scholars note, a singularly moral one.[78] Certainly, the author of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* did envision the victory implied in the title of the text to be a moral one. The resounding echoes of the *Shāh-nāmah* strongly suggest this, particularly the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s reference to the story of Seyavash, whose own physical death at the hands of Afrasiyab is the former's moral triumph.[79] But the *Ẓafar-nāmah* as a poetic strategy goes beyond a merely moral victory. As we have noted, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is also itself the aesthetic sword through which the Guru gave battle and secured a concrete triumph, a meeting with the emperor. For authors like Sewa Das and Kirpal Singh Bhalla and their successors, the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb is understood as the bane of all Sikhs, the ruler responsible for the deaths of Guru Tegh Bahadar and the Guru's four beloved children, not to mention the persecution of the Sikhs generally and of Khalsa Sikhs in particular (a point upon which later, nineteenth-century Sikh writers of Persian would elaborate in their references to the tenth Guru's epistle).[80] Apparently writing very soon after the demise of the tenth Guru and his four beloved sons, Sewa Das paints the emperor in a light much more harsh than that shone upon Aurangzeb by the author of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* itself, and in such a glow it is no surprise that for Sewa Das (and Kirpal Singh Bhalla who shares the Guru's Khatri *zat*[81]) the Guru is absolutely true to his word. The Epistle of Victory becomes a testament to the Guru's complete victory over Aurangzeb, not just a moral or poetic victory but a triumph which ultimately leaves this wicked adversary dead. For Sewa Das it is through the text of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* that the tenth Guru destroys Aurangzeb, an understanding that the *Ẓafar-nāmah*'s own testament to the Guru's sovereignty easily accommodates. For Sewa Das and for many eighteenth-century Sikhs, it was beyond doubt that Guru Gobind Singh was the True King of both this world and the next.[82]

ਜਬ ਨਰਿੰਗ ਸਾਹ ਖਤ ਕੀ ਇਹ ਪਾਲ ਵਾਚੀ ਤਬ ਨਰਿੰਗ ਸਾਹ ਭਾਈ
ਦਇਆ ਸਿੰਘ ਕੀ ਓਰਿ ਦੇਖਿਆ ਅਰ ਕਹਿਆ ਜੋ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਪੈਦਾ ਹੂਆ ਹੈ।
ਤਾ ਭਾਈ ਦਇਆ ਸਿੰਘ ਕਹਿਆ ਹਾ ਜੀ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਪੈਦਾ ਹੂਆ ਹੈ। ਫੇਰ

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ਨੌਰੰਗ ਸਾਹ ਕਹਿਆ। ਹੁਣੇ ਤਾ ਉਸ ਨ ਸੀ ਹੋਵਣਾ ਪੈਦਾ ਦੁਖ ਪਾਏਗਾ। ਜਬ ਇਹ ਬਾਤ ਨਰਿੰਗ ਸਾਹ ਕਹੀ ਤਬ ਮੁਖ ਪੀਅਰਾ ਹੋਇ ਗਇਆ ਫਿਰਿ ਮਰ ਗਇਆ।[83]

When Aurangzeb read this line [from the *Ẓafar-nāmah*] he looked at and addressed Bhai Daya Singh. He asked, "Has the Khalsa been created?" Bhai Daya Singh replied, "Yes sir, it has come into existence." Aurangzeb spoke again, "It should not have been created now. Catastrophe lies ahead." As soon as Aurangzeb spoke these words his face turned [ghostly] pale and he died.[84]

We may therefore say here that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* has accrued a good deal of supernatural power over the intervening year(s) since the completion of *Gur Sobhā*, manifesting the desires of the Guru's Sikhs during the tumultuous eighteenth century and thus once again underscoring the text's nature as a *yādgāh/lieu de mémoire*. The mere reading of the text will become an act that destroys the wicked while fulfilling the requests of the righteous, a claim often enunciated clearly in the closing lines of many of the manuscript copies of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. These lines follow the pattern we discover here, within the *phala-śruti* passage of manuscript 199*kh* at Guru Nanak Dev University (titled *Zafarnāmā Saṭīk*):

...ਤਾਹੀ ਚੌਥੇ ਦਿਨੋ ਉਪਰੰਤ ਸਿਖ ਆਏ। ਓਨਾ ਆਇ ਕਹਿਆ ਜੀ ਅਰੰਗਾ ਮਾਰਿਆ। ਬੋਲ ਵਾਹਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਫਤੇ। ਜੋ ਕੋਈ ਗੁਰੂ ਕਾ ਸਿਖ ਸੁਣੇਗਾ ਪੜੇਗਾ ਵਿਚਾਰੇਗਾ ਉਸਦੀ ਸਰਬ ਭਾਵਨਾ ਪੂਰੀ ਹੋਵੇਗੀ। ਮੁਕਤ ਹੋਵੇਗਾ ਜਨਮ ਮਰਨ ਤੀ ਛੁਟੇਗਾ ਬਡਾ ਫਲੁ ਹੈ ਇਸ ਜੇਹਾ ਅਵਰ ਫਲੁ ਕੋਈ ਨਾਹੀ। ਜ਼ਫਰਨਾਮਾ ਪੜੇ ਸੁਣੇ ਤੇ ਜੰਗ ਵਿਚ ਜਾਵੇ ਤਿਸ ਕੀ ਫਤੇ ਹੋਵੈਗੀ ਜਿਵੇ ਅਰੰਗੇ ਨੂ ਮਾਰ ਫਤੇ ਪਾਈ। ਤਿਵੇ ਸੁਣਨ ਪੜਨ ਵਾਲਾ ਫਤੇ ਪਾਵੇਗਾ। ਬੋਲੋ ਜੀ ਵਾਹਗੁਰੂ ਵਾਹਗੁਰੂ ਵਾਹਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ।[85]

and so four days later the Sikhs arrived. They came and informed [the Guru], "Master (*jī*), Aurangzeb is dead."

Say "*Vāhigurū jī kī fateh!*" Any Sikh of the Guru who hears, reads, and/or contemplates [the *Ẓafar-nāmah*] will have his wishes (*bhāvnā*) all fulfilled. He will obtain release as well as destroy the [endless] cycle of birth and death. This is the greatest fruit. No other fruit exists like it. [That Sikh] who goes to battle and hears and/or reads the *Zafarnāmā* will be victorious. As Aurangzeb was killed and victory obtained

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[through the letter] so will the person who listens to and/or reads the *Zafar-nāmā* procure victory. [Reflect on this] and say "*Vāhigurū Vāhigurū jī!*"

The creative tautology inherent in the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is here in the *phala-śruti* transcribed into legend. Of course, such claims as to the power of the Guru's words whether written or heard should elicit little surprise in the light of doctrines such as Guru Granth. Since the time of the Gurus themselves, their words have held a tremendously powerful and sacred place in the collective Sikh imagination, playing a very important role in the construction of Sikh personhood—an especially potent factor to remember as Sikhs worldwide celebrated the 300th anniversary of *gurta gaddī diwas*, the day on which the scripture was proclaimed Guru, in late October 2008. As these are the words of the Gurus as well as the word of the True Guru, Akal Purakh, enshrined within the Guru Granth Sahib (and for some Sikhs within the Dasam Granth) these simply pulsate with a divine energy. To this day, the words of the Gurus saturate the air every morning giving solace to all within listening range throughout the Punjab; it is these words which transform mere water into *amrit* as soon as these are recited over it. It is this sentiment, the power inherent in words and promises, that permeates the two passages from *Sūraj Prakāś* that grace the beginning of this chapter. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continuing today, the power of the Gurus' words may be witnessed in all Sikh rituals and in such manuals as *Śardhā Puran* and *Saṅket Mochan*, texts that prescribe the recitation of particular verses of *gur-bāṇī* to soothe various ailments or secure particular aims.[86]

Sikh texts that appear after the debut of the *Parchiān* of Sewa Das and the first *Mahimā Prakaś* continue to suffuse their *Ẓafar-nāmah* narratives with the extraordinary power of the Guru and his words. In almost all of these, it is the Guru's letter and the words within that result in Aurangzeb's death. This is the case in Sarup Das Bhalla's text[87] as too in Sukkha Singh's late eighteenth-century *gur-bilās*, which tells us that Khalsa Sikhs are presented with an option when it comes to destroying the emperor and the formidable army under his command:

ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਸਿੰਧ ਗੁਰ ਦੇਵ ਜੂ ਬਸ ਕਾਂਗੜ ਇਹ ਥਾਨ । ਤਵਨ ਸਮੈ ਸੰਗ ਖਾਲਸੇ ਇਹ ਬਿਧ ਬਚਨ ਬਖਾਨ । ਬਾਦਸਾਹ ਕਉ ਮਾਰੀਐ ਕਰੀਐ ਕਵਨ ਉਪਾਇ । ਕੈ ਕਾਗਦ ਲਿਖ ਮਾਰੀਐ ਕੈ ਸਨਮੁਖ ਰਣ ਘਾਇ ।[88]

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> The place [at which] the divine Guru who is the Ocean of Mercy stopped was the village of Kaṅgaṛ [about 5 kilometers south of Dina]. At that time, he spoke the following words to the gathered Khalsa: "What method should be used to kill the emperor? Either he should be killed with a written letter (*kāgad likh*) or smitten [while] facing the battlefield."

It is, of course, the former course of action that the Guru takes and the end result although not immediate is easily as miraculous:

> ਪਾਛੈ ਪੜਨ ਸਾਥ ਬਿਜਨਾਮੈ । ਅਨਿਕ ਭਾਤਿ ਭਯੋ ਸਾਹਿ ਬਿਰਾਮੈ । ਯੌ ਜਨ ਹਨਿਓ ਸਾਹ ਉਰ ਸਿਕਾ । ਅਰੁਨ ਬਰਨ ਭਯੋ ਬਦਨ ਸੁ ਫਿਕਾ । ਤਾਹੀ ਦੁਖ ਹਜਰਤ ਮਰ ਗਯੋ । ਹਾਹਾਕਾਰ ਤੁਰਕ ਗ੍ਰਿਹ ਭਯੋ । ਕੇਤਕ ਦਿਨਾ ਸੁ ਰਹਿਓ ਸੁਮਾਰਾ । ਤਨਕ ਨ ਬਾਹਰ ਨਿਕਸੀ ਸਾਰਾ । ਇਹ ਬਿਧ ਸੋ ਦਯਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੂ ਫਿਰਿਓ ਬਿਜੈ ਰਣ ਪਾਇ ।[89]
>
> After having read the Epistle of Victory (*bij-nāma*) the emperor suffered afflictions [of various types] as if the "Servant of God" himself had held [Aurangzeb's] breath and heart with power. The red color of his body turned into a disagreeable (jaundiced) appearance. The emperor then became distressed and died. The empire of the Turk (*grih turk*) was thrown into lamentation. The many days of grief cannot be reckoned. No one came outside for even a small amount of time. In this way the respectable Daya Singh had obtained victory on the field and returned [to the Guru].

While in the *Bańsāvalī-nāmā*:

> ਦਿਨ ਚਾਲੀ ਤਿਸ ਅੰਦਰ ਪੜ੍ਹਦਾ ਰਹਿਆ । ਬਾਹਰਿ ਤਦ ਨਿਕਲਿਆ ਜਦਿ ਮਰਿ ਗਇਆ ।[90]
>
> [Aurangzeb] continued reading [the *Ẓafar-nāmah*] inside [his palace] for forty days. He only came outside when he died.

There is here a nice symmetry observed in the *Bańsāvalī-nāmā* that holds true for most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sikh texts that attempt to elaborate upon the relationships between the Sikh Gurus and the Mughal emperors. While Guru Nanak brings a descendant of Timur to the throne through his blessings,[91] Guru Gobind Singh destroys another through his reproach.

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Perhaps within this text we also hear echoes once again of the *Shāh-nāmah*. The tenth Guru may well be cast as the great hero, Rostam, who is both the *tāj-bakhsh* or "crown-bestower" and the one who carries the "king's luminous glory" or the *farr-i shāhānshāh* (Rostam is, let us moreover recall, also a king in his own right).[92] Guru Gobind Singh carries this *farr* by virtue of the belief that Guru Nanak bestowed sovereignty upon the Mughals. Certainly Kesar Singh Chhibbar is one among a number of eighteenth-century Sikh authors cognizant of these traditions regarding the bestowal of authority, but it seems that Guru Gobind Singh may have himself been aware of such a legacy as his preeminent poet, Bhai Nand Lal Goya, suggests in the *Dīvān-i Goyā*:

بادشاهان را فقیران بادشاهی داده اند زان گدای کوی اورا بادشاه فهمیده ایم[93]

> Revered men (*faqīrān*) have given dominion to the [world's] kings. It is on account of this that we have recognized the beggar in His lane as an emperor.

It is only fitting in this light therefore that in these same and other accounts dealing with the life of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru embraces Guru Nanak's legacy by both ensuring and blessing the succession of Aurangzeb's eldest son, Prince Mu'azzam/Bahadar Shah.[94] In a different way, therefore, the words of Piara Singh Padam ring loudly:

> ਜ਼ਫ਼ਰਨਾਮੇ ਦੀ ਵਿਥਿਆ ਦਾ ਪਿਛੋਕੜ ਜਾਣਨ ਲਈ ਜ਼ਰੂਰੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਪਹਿਲੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਤੇ ਮੁਗ਼ਲ ਬਾਦਸ਼ਾਹਾਂ ਦੇ ਸੰਬੰਧਾਂ ਵੱਲ ਪੰਛੀ-ਝਾਤ ਪਾਈ ਜਾਵੇ।[95]
>
> In order to understand the background of the history of the *Zafar-nāmā* it is essential to first obtain a bird's eye view of the relationship between the Mughal emperors and the Sikh Gurus.

Let us finally conclude this chapter with Santokh Singh, the preeminent conveyer of *gur-bilās* tradition. It is likely that by Santokh Singh's time, as new networks of communication were being established by both the kingdom of Ranjit Singh and the British presence in India, literate Sikhs had become somewhat more familiar with the historiography surrounding Aurangzeb, in that he had died many months if not a year after it was believed that the letter of the tenth Guru had been delivered. Nevertheless, *Sūraj Prakaś* still manages to modify the miraculous in the *Ẓafar-nāmah* narratives to accommodate

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what was surely seen in the light of past material as an annoying truth.[96] To this end Aurangzeb finishes hearing the *Ẓafar-nāmah* after which he is asked by Daya Singh to give back the quiver that the Guru had given him as a keepsake (*amānat*; *dhrohar*) after the two had transported themselves to Mecca through supernatural means, a supernatural journey that is reminiscent of a similar one of which we hear in Kesar Singh Chhibbar's genealogy of the ten Gurus.[97] Earlier upon receiving the said quiver, the Guru explained to Aurangzeb that it was to be returned upon the latter's meeting with the Guru's Sikhs (1:31:23–24):

ਦੀਯ ਕਪੀਰਾ ਲਿਖਿ ਪਰਵਾਨਾ। ਰੁਖਸਦ ਕਰੇ ਸਚਿੰਤਾ ਮਹਾਨਾ। ਬੀਜ ਰੋਗ ਕੋ ਉਗਵਜੋ ਤਬੈ। ਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਨਿਜ ਔਰ ਹੇਤੁ ਲਖਿ ਸਬੈ।[98]

He gave both the quiver and written orders [of safe conduct] to Daya Singh. Having dismissed them (Daya and Dharam Singh) [the emperor] became very anxious. Afterward [as a result] a sickness sprouted within him. He knew completely that this would lead to his own death.

Aurangzeb's death would wait until the thirty-seventh section of the first *ain* of *Sūraj Prakāś* in time for Daya Singh's long and arduous journey back to the Guru with Aurangzeb's two mace-bearers to come to an end. Their reunion is a joyous one during which Daya Singh quickly relays all of the information of his encounter with the emperor to the Guru and his gathered Sikhs, finally handing over to the tenth Master the quiver-deposit. It is then that Daya Singh tells the Guru of Aurangzeb's condition after the emperor had read the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. Once again, the main cause of illness is familiarity with the contents of the Guru's missive. Daya Singh explains:

ਹੁਤੋ ਜ਼ਫਰਨਾਮਾ ਤੁਮ ਕਰ ਕੋ। ਜਬਿ ਹਮ ਦੇ ਕਰਿ ਹਟੇ ਵਹਰਿ ਕੋ। ਤਤਛਿਨ ਹਜ਼ਰਤ ਕੋ ਦੁਖ ਹੋਵਾ। ਪੁਨ ਕੋ ਅੰਤਰ ਗਯੋ ਨ ਜੋਵਾ। ਖੋਟੀ ਸੁਧਿ ਪਸਰੀ ਚਹੂੰ ਓਰ। ਦੁਰ ਦੁਰ ਕਹੈਂ ਨ ਮਾਚਜੋ ਸ਼ੋਰ।[99]

[after I gave the emperor] the *Zafar-nāmā* which you wrote, we withdrew and were sent outside. Immediately, the emperor became distressed and going inside once again we could not see him. He became aware of his sins and these set upon every direction of his heart. It was said that he lay seriously ill but there was no outcry [as he was hidden from view].

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To this the Guru replies:

ਸੁਨਿ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕਹਿ ਆਛੀ ਕੀਨਿ । ਮਰਹਿ ਨੁਰੰਗਾ ਬਿਲਮ ਬਿਹਨਿ ।[100]

Hearing [Daya Singh's report], the True Guru said, "Well done. Aurangzeb's death will be deprived of delay."

It is likely that the authors of eighteenth-century Sikh literature transformed the *Ẓafar-nāmah* into the above-mentioned "magical text"—whose mere reading could have dire consequences for the unrighteous—for many reasons. Certainly, their inclusion of the letter's writing and its dispatch to the emperor within their texts allowed them to further enhance their characterization of the tenth Guru by indirectly commenting upon his grand courtliness, erudition, manliness, heroism, and sovereignty, an appealing image that permeates the *gur-bilās* literature, which was directed to an audience composed in part of the peasant Sikh communities who claimed a more elite warrior status—devotion to a figure like Guru Gobind Singh would easily translate into an enhanced reputation as a warrior and ruler in an environment suffused with such images.[101] But the effect the letter has on the emperor, who is after all a reader, demonstrates the faith of the *gur-bilās* authors in the tenth Guru's extraordinary spiritual power, a mere word of whose writing could destroy the most fierce opponents of righteousness. Could such a message have been also directed toward the contemporary Sikh leaders and chieftains of the popular *gur-bilās* authors, specifically the *misldār*s, who often competed and battled amongst themselves, at times violating the very principles noted within both the Sikh scripture and the *rahit-nāmās* (infringements very much akin to a lack of righteousness)?[102] This is likely the case. Such a post-1708 recasting of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* may well have provided a powerful caution to such Sikh chieftains, to their retainers and service groups, and to any Sikh leaders of the period; a violation of the ideal behaviors noted in the letter was symbolically a rejection of the tenth Guru. Inevitably such denial would precipitate drastic consequences. The *phala-śruti* message of the *Zafar-nāme Saṭīk* (MS. 199*kh* Guru Nanak Dev University) we noted earlier and others we discover within texts of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* itself may have been intended to also have a reverse effect: defying the principles in the *Ẓafar-nāmah* would lead not to victory but defeat.

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Conclusion

RATHER THAN BEGIN this concluding chapter with an apt epigram or quotation, let me commence with an image (figure 7.1), one popular artistic representation of the tenth Sikh Master among the many thousands which exist. This is one particular way of articulating a history and a memory of both Guru Gobind Singh and the *Ẓafar-nāmah* upon which we have not yet elaborated, one that is neither in the realm of orality nor literacy proper.

Guru Gobind Singh has been represented in Sikh art since before he died in 1708, as the courtly pahari image about which I wrote in the *Darbar of the Sikh Gurus* makes clear.[1] There are a number of such very early Sikh images that still exist, as paintings in varied collections, as well as frescoes or metalwork in gurdwaras, samadhs, dharamsalas, and other Sikh shrines (historical or otherwise) worldwide. A few months spent in various gurdwaras and museums throughout the Sikh world as well as a Google search of the tenth Guru's image reveals hundreds of these artistic representations, the vast majority of which follow the tropes and themes articulated by Hew McLeod over twenty years ago in his delightful book *Popular Sikh Art*, namely that the image of the tenth Guru manifests the martial and vigorous character generally attributed to the Khalsa in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sikh literature:[2] a Durkheiman representation onto which Sikh hopes and aspirations, and fears and doubts, have been and continue to be undoubtedly cast. For this reason, we characteristically see the Guru in his armor, on horseback, hunting, sitting in his darbar, gifting the Panj Piare with the bequest of *amrit*, and so on, all indicative more or less of his kingly and soldierly status. The earliest extant images of the Guru portray these themes consistently.

The illustration that begins this conclusion for example follows suit by visualizing the Guru's escape from Anandpur, dressed in his spotless kingly finery, standing upon an earthen pedestal with his rare *chittā bāz* or white falcon perched upon his gloved left hand,[3] but it also combines a number of other interrelated messages, embracing themes we find in the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, thereby perhaps indirectly alluding to the text of the epistle itself, which was, as we have seen many times now, prompted by the evacuation illustrated here. Although the evident symbols in this image are predominantly those of battle and defense (sword, shield, and spear; pennant and flag), in the gestures we

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FIGURE 7.1. Guru Gobind Singh evacuating Anandpur. Artist: G. S. Sohan Singh. Contemporary lithograph.

see a subtle connection to our epistle, particularly the raised arms of certain figures through which one can almost hear the gathered Sikhs shouting out the *jaikārā*, the victory call (*Vāhigurū jī kā khālsā; Vāhigurū jī kī fatah*: The Khalsa belongs to God as too does victory!), a shout in which distant echoes of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* may be also heard (especially in this context). There is, to be sure, a symmetry here: like the Guru's epistle, the illustration speaks of victory in the midst of what is, in reality, defeat. Here we have visualized the Guru's moral victory over Aurangzeb, a victory that makes inevitable the application of bright and glorious colors.

There is here as well a hint of the more spiritual dimension of the tenth Master (also indicated in part by the halo), as the famous *Bachitar Nāṭak* quote printed on the image itself makes clear:

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ਹਮ ਇਹ ਕਾਜ ਜਗਤ ਮੋ ਆਏ । ਧਰਮ ਹੇਤ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਪਠਾਏ । ਜਹਾਂ ਤਹਾਂ ਤੁਮ ਧਰਮ ਬਿਥਾਰੋ । ਦੁਸਟ ਦੋਖਿਯਨਿ ਪਕਰਿ ਪਛਾਰੋ ।[4]

I have been born into this world for this purpose: the Lord sent me to uphold truth and righteousness. Let these be established in every place you go, so that you may destroy evil and cast it out [of the world].

This image not only appears to tie together the *Bachitar Nāṭak* and the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, but it also depicts a somewhat more contemplative, less martial dimension of the Guru's character. Put simply, what we have here is the visualization of the Guru as the master of *mīrī* and *pīrī*.

Such introspective, less aggressive portraits would include the image that Hew McLeod notes as an appropriation of Hofmann's famous painting of Christ at the Garden of Gethsemene.[5] To this we may add images of the tenth Guru with palms brought together in front of the Guru Granth Sahib, conferring upon the Sikh scripture the respect that is its due. We also find images of Guru Gobind Singh together with his four sons and as well with Banda Bahadar, the latter painted as a *sadhu* in southern India, representing what is meant to be their first-ever meeting, which changed the direction of the latter's life (although this image also emphasizes the Guru's more martial character, perhaps a veiled criticism of the life of the *sadhu*, a lifestyle often negatively evaluated in the Adi Granth and the *vārs* of Bhai Gurdas).[6] At times as well we see the tenth Guru as the beloved father of the *chār sāhibzāde*.

But what is surprising in this seemingly unending, diachronic repertoire (contemplative and martial images alike) is the general lack of paintings dealing with the Guru in his literary capacity. This should elicit astonishment when one considers that Guru Gobind Singh is easily the most prolific Guru in popular Sikh history and memory, distancing him profoundly from Guru Arjan the second most productive Guru.[7] Although the tenth Master has no hymns within the Guru Granth Sahib,[8] he is, according to tradition, singularly responsible for not just the vast and varied contents of the Dasam Granth, but also for two other massive compendia of stories and hymns, namely the *Sarab Loh Granth* (also known as the *Srī Maṅglācharan Granth*) and as well the no-longer-extant *Vidyā Sāgar*.[9] While Sikh tradition therefore paints an image of Guru Gobind Singh that sees him spending as much if not more time at the writer's desk (as it were) as he does on the battlefield, the actual painting of Sikh artistic narrative relegates this activity to a miniscule, marginal space.

Such absence may perhaps reflect the controversial nature of all of the poetry attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, controversy that in part prompted

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the early Singh Sabha of Amritsar to delegate a committee to examine the contents of the Dasam Granth, which we earlier noted and which has led to a consistent disregard of the Nihang *Sarab Loh Granth*.[10] A steady imagery of the Guru's literary endeavors may have confirmed that the general Sikh consensus was one of acceptance of the Guru's authorship of these intriguing yet contentious texts. The lack of such images may also be understood in a much more straightforward manner: there is very little excitement, drama, and grandeur in sitting and writing, especially for a Guru generally understood to have embodied disciplined action like Guru Gobind Singh, unless sitting and writing has a climactic and palpable outcome. Unless what one wrote was very much a form of verbal warfare.

There is thus one exception to this general rule. The only instance in which we do find the Guru in a literary capacity regards the preparation of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, as he sits and writes out this letter to Aurangzeb. And

FIGURE 7.2. Guru Gobind Singh writing the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. Image painted onto the tiles just before the entrance to the *chubārā* at Gurdwara Zafarnamah Lohgarh, Dina. Artist: Srivastava. Photo by author, December 2010.

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this, as far as I can tell, is a rather modern phenomenon since there seem to be no (extant) eighteenth- to mid-nineteenth-century images of the tenth Guru in this capacity. I am, moreover, unsure as to the specific context out of which this image appeared. But as this is the sole popular representation of the Guru doing so, we may conjecture about how the Guru's literary activities were received by late nineteenth-century Sikhs and are by Sikhs today. At least visually, the Guru's literary activities that are not strictly tied into his martial and courtly endeavors are relegated to the margins while those which are, namely the singular writing of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, are not. Such images then appear to be an extension of the martial and kingly vigor we see in other popular representations as, generally speaking, the letter is understood as a rebuke, a slap on Aurangzeb's royal face, a letter which allows Guru Gobind Singh to thoroughly defeat and humiliate his and by extension the Sikhs' greatest antagonist. This is verbal warfare. An artist need not even show the Persian script or any writing whatsoever on the page to allow Sikhs to make this association with the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. Just such an image of the Guru writing cast into the tiles adjoining the entrance to the *chubārā* in which Guru Gobind Singh is alleged to have stayed while at village Dina shows the Guru writing in Gurmukhi script, with the title *Ẓafarnāmā* clearly visible (figure 7.2). In fact, around Dina and Kangar such images of the Guru, as a sovereign exercising his diplomatic rights (if one will) allow for such an anachronistic portrayal and are also accompanied by the appearance of *bait* 22 (figure 7.3), once again the couplet that is inscribed throughout the villages of Dina and Kangar with which the letter is associated.

Since I have only been able to trace this particular representation of Guru Gobind Singh to the early to mid-twentieth century, it is likely that the image is for the most part more a reflection of mid- to late twentieth-century Sikh politics, affairs in which Sikhs since the time of Indian Independence in 1947 have been seeking a limited autonomy from the Indian government in New Delhi. Such independence was forcefully articulated in the Punjabi Suba agitation of the 1950s and '60s as well as tacitly assumed in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of the early 1970s. As a result of numerous interrelated factors, such concerns were in turn augmented to form the pretext for both the horrific violence that engulfed the Punjab during the late 1980s and '90s, and the tremendous courage that was shown there by so many Sikhs at that terrible time.[11] As these images were thoroughly connected to the *Ẓafar-nāmah* generally and *bait* 22 specifically, their frequency most likely reflects the underlying premise on which certain Sikhs may have justified the use of violence against a state that was at the time believed to have targeted Sikhs

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and their religious tradition for elimination, a recycling in many ways of the myths and tragic events precipitated by the siege of Anandpur and the reign of the emperor Aurangzeb. As we have noted, this particular *bait* was in no way singled out until the later nineteenth century, under the auspices of the Singh Sabha.

The current political situation today is much changed, with many virulent Sikh voices within India itself having been quieted by the appointment of a Sikh prime minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh. The particular way in which contemporary Sikhs have expressed their appreciation for the *Ẓafar-nāmah*, however, has remained steady throughout the last hundred years. Although it is still referenced and debated among select groups of academics and amateur historians, as one can tell from the many books dealing with the letter that have been written over the last thirty years, the epistle's role in popular Sikh history and memory is predominantly to uphold the Sikh claim to armed struggle as a last resort. And so, for the most part today, the *Ẓafar-nāmah* has been completely shorn of its miraculous content thanks, in part, to the tireless

FIGURE 7.3. Guru Gobind Singh preparing the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. ("Sri Guru Gobind Singh ji writing the *Zafar-nāmā* in Village Dina-Kangar") The Persian text he is writing is *Ẓafar-nāmah* 22. This same *bait* in Gurmukhi also frames the top and bottom of the painting. Painting in the langar area of Gurdwara Zafarnama Lohgarh in Dina. Artist: Gurjeet Singh. Photo by author, December 2010.

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campaigns of the Singh Sabha movement of the later nineteenth century and those erudite and passionate Sikhs who have inherited its renown.[12]

The few exceptions to this general rule may be found predominantly in the locales intimately associated with the *Ẓafar-nāmah* such as Dina-Kangar, where the general impression I gathered is that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* was still understood as having prompted Aurangzeb's demise, a consensus captured within the literature issued from these precincts.[13] No doubt the pride and self-respect or *izzat* engendered among the Malwai inhabitants of these areas in the role their ancestors played in the letter's production has ensured that this memory and their actions would be kept very much alive. As noted earlier, each gurdwara associated with the letter reminds us of those *baits* that among academics are considered controversial, namely *Ẓafar-nāmah* 58–59, which refer by name to both the Berar Sikhs and the village of Kangar.

Of the many ways of expressing Sikhness that are prevalent today, it is perhaps within the Nihang Sikh tradition that the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is treated most reverently, in that these Sikhs are the only ones whom I have witnessed to express a reverence toward the single text of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* including the *Ḥikāyats* that is near similar to that shown to the Guru Granth Sahib. As my Buddha Dal Nihang Singh interlocutor withdrew a copy of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* from its locked-glass cabinet in late 2010 during my visit to village Kangar and Gurdwara Zafarnama, he placed a *rumālla* upon his head onto which he immediately placed the manuscript to walk it the few feet to a cushion upon which the text was then lovingly opened for my inspection. As Nihangs generally believe themselves to manifest in their person the genuine teachings of the tenth Guru in respect to weapons, it should elicit little surprise that the text so intimately associated with Guru Gobind Singh, a text which is itself a weapon as I have argued, should secure such respect, a far cry from its alleged assessment by the tenth Guru's own poet, Sainapati.[14]

Above, I state that the Singh Sabha was only partially responsible for the modern understanding of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. I say this because there is at least one early nineteenth-century reference to the epistle that suggests that these more contemporary concerns were also the principal force behind interpreting the *Ẓafar-nāmah* during this earlier time as well. It is perhaps because Khushwaqt Rai was a part of the "affective community" crafted by the *gurbilās* literature (a *premī* or "lover" according to Purnima Dhavan)[15] that he waxes eloquently on the characteristics he believes the tenth Guru possessed, ones that perfectly aligned the tenth Master with the ideal courtier-ruler who espoused the most noble values of the legendary Sikh courts of the past with which Khushwaqt Rai was familiar, manifesting the ideal to which all later

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rulers such as Ranjit Singh and Alha Singh would aspire (at least superficially). To this end, therefore, the inclusion of a substantial portion of the *Ẓafar-nāmah* in his narrative makes sense as the writing of such a letter no doubt allowed our *premī* to further demonstrate the tenth Guru's courtly perfection by the crafting of a most masterful *maṡnavī*.

Khushwaqt Rai's interest in the *Ẓafar-nāmah* in the early nineteenth century seems to demonstrate a near prescience of later understandings by including only those *baits* which praise the divine, attest to Aurangzeb's despicable character, speak of the Battle of Chamkaur, and focus upon upholding oaths. The last was, it appears, a particularly essential quality when one considers the treachery of Sikh chiefs who had sought an alliance with the British East India Company in 1809 having had earlier exchanged turbans with Ranjit Singh, having through such an alliance symbolically broken their word to the Sikh monarch. Khushwaqt Rai ends his reference to the epistle with *bait* 55 (omitting *baits* 49–54) to make this point:

همون مرد باید شود سخنور نه شکم دگر در دهان دگر[16]

> A man should be eloquent in this way: he must not have one thing in his mouth and another in his belly.

Ending with such seems to recommend that the letter itself is a guide to the virtue of truthfullness.

What Khushwaqt Rai edits out is of course equally significant. Certainly he ignores the tenth Guru's *baits* in praise of Aurangzeb as these would be counter to his purpose in propping up the tenth Guru as the true exemplary ruler. There was as well perhaps no need to include further remonstrations against Aurangzeb or the tenth Guru's request to meet the emperor as an equal because the Sikhs had already achieved such a sovereign equality by Khushwaqt Rai's time, that of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the Sikh kingdom, a point he elaborates throughout the lengthiest portion of his text narrating the gradual development of Sikh states and monarchy.[17] Or perhaps because references to full equality and sovereignty (rather than rituals that attempted to demonstrate a symbolic equality in the absence of an actual one)[18] among the Sikh chieftains in the nineteenth century would not be conducive to the monarchy established by Ranjit Singh (although Khushwaqt Rai does note that there is a sovereign-like equality among the subimperial chiefs themselves), our esteemed Khatri author chose to simply discount the last half of the *Ẓafar-nāmah*. Finally, the many *baits* that further underscore the tenth

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Guru's reliance upon the divine in his battles against the Mughals were most likely eliminated to be more in line with Khushwaqt Rai's general attitude toward the tenth Guru and the Khalsa's rise to prominence in the eighteenth century. This rise had little if anything to do with the favor showered upon the Guru and the Sikhs by the goddess (a theme we discover in many *gur-bilās* accounts). Rather, reasons for the Guru's creation and the Khalsa's success were almost strictly mechanical: the Gūru created the Khalsa to rid the Sikh panth of its *masands* and to confront Aurangzeb's persecution of non-Muslims head on, while later Sikhs were able to work together near effortlessly to secure their aims, collective and individual.[19]

In the context of contemporary Sikh worship and within the context of the construction of Sikh identity, such themes that resonate or are made to resonate throughout the text will continue. The *Ẓafar-nāmah* in the end is very much a testament to Sikh independence and gives textual form to the fulfillment of the popular Sikh refrain, *rāj karegā khālsā*, "the Khalsa shall rule," and as such the epistle will be remembered for as long as Sikhs gather together to listen to and sing the hymns of the Gurus, to listen to their glorious history, and to prognosticate a future in which Sikhs and Khalsa Sikhs can design their own individual destinies as well as their collective ones.

It is a text therefore that deserves to be thoroughly excavated, a task that I hope I have begun here. For the *Ẓafar-nāmah* is a far more textured, rich, and robust Sikh work than any scholarship on the Sikh tradition has thus far demonstrated, underscoring what seems to be the tenth Guru's keen awareness of the Islamicate context out of which the tradition he inherited, sustained, and augmented emerged.

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Glossary

Ādi Granth Primal Text; the Sikh scripture
ahadī Mughal soldier
ahl-i namāz People of the *namāz*, Muslims
Ahriman Dark force in Zoroastrian mythology; the devil
Akāl Purakh The Being Beyond Time; God
Akāl Ustati *In Praise of Akal* (God)
akẖlāqī Dispositional literature
amānat (dhrohar) Keepsake
Ammrit Kīrtan Text prescribing which hymns to sing on set days
ammrit sanskār Ritual of initiation into the Khalsa
apadharma "Dharma in Extremity": period when dharma is absent
ardās Prayer of the Khalsa, "petition"
Arthāśāstra *Manual of Statecraft* of Kautilya/Chanakya
ʿarż dāsẖt "Petition"; formal Mughal document
asfoṭak kabitt "Obscure poems"; final section of Dasam Granth
Bachitar Nāṭak *Wonderful Drama*, biography of Guru Gobind Singh to 1696
Bachitar Nāṭak Granth Compositions within the Dasam Granth
bakẖsẖī Mughal collector
bāṇī "Sacred utterance"; usually refers to Sikh sacred scripture
bait "Couplet," "disticht"; popular genre of Persian poetry
bayʿat al-nisā' Promise of the Women
bazm Festivity
Benatī Chaupaī Petition in *chaupaī* meter
bhaṅg Cannabis
birādarī Kinship group based on a common patriarch
bīṛh Recension of the Sikh scripture
bismallāh Beginning of the Muslim prayer, "In the Name of God"
Būstān *The Orchard* of Shaikh Saʿdi
Chaṇḍī Charitr *Stories of the Deeds of Chandi*

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Chaṇḍī Charitr Ukti Bilās *Enjoyment of the Recitation of the Stories of the Deeds of Chandi*

charḥdī kalā High spirits

charitr "Deeds"; style of poetry narrating the story of kings and gods

chār sāhibzāde The four sons of Guru Gobind Singh

Chaubīs Avtār *The Twenty-Four Incarnations*

chaupāī Quatrain

chhand (chhant) Poem

chhāp Impression; sobriquet

daṇḍā Justice; big stick

darbār Court; the Sikh scripture

darśan Privileged religious viewing

darwājā Gateway

dastān Story

dastār būngā "Turban fortress"; a high conical turban bedecked with symbols

dasvandh One-tenth share of one's income distributed for the benefit of the Panth

Devī Māhātmyā *Glory of the Goddess*, part of the Markanadeya Purana

ḍhāḍhī Style of Sikh music; musician who plays this music

dharam yuddh Righteous battle

dhiān Focused concentration

dehqān Squire; the class to which Ferdausi belonged

dīvān Administrator; collection of Persian poetry; a gathering

Dīvān-i Goyā Set of 61 Persian ghazals attributed to Nand Lal Goya

dohā Couplet; oft-used Brajbhasha/Hindi/Punjabi meter

ezāfah Linking encilitic in Persian grammar

fanā' Spiritual state of annihilation in the divine

farmān Document granting the bearer permission to do something

farr Divine light of rulership present in all the legitimate Iranian kings

Fatḥ-nāmah *Victory Letter* attributed to Guru Gobind Singh

faujdār Commander

Futūḥ al-Salāṭīn *Victory of the Sultans* by Abu'l Malik 'Isami

garḥ Fort

gauhar Geneaology

ghazal Poem with specific meter (AA BA CA . . .); most common Persian poem

giānī Traditional Sikh intellectual

Giān Prabodh *The Awakening of Knowledge [of the Divine]*

Gulistān *Rose Garden* of Shaikh Sa'di

Gulshan-i Ibrahimī (Tarīkh-i Ferishtah) Ferishtah's famous history of the world

gur-bilās "Splendor of the Guru"; genre of Sikh literature

gurmukhī "From the mouth of the Guru"; the most common script of Indian Punjabi

gurzbardār Mace-bearer

ḥakīm Traditional doctor

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ḥāl "Condition"; state of awareness in Sufi development
ḥamd Eulogy of Allah at the beginning of a poem
Hanumān Nāṭak *Drama of Hanuman*
Harkāre A do-all
ḥasbulḥukm "As commanded"; Mughal document
Ḥikāyats *Stories*, Persian compositions attributed to Guru Gobind Singh
ḥīlati Stratagem
Hitopadeśa *Good Advice*
honar Talent
hukam-nāmā Written Instruction
humā Legendary Persian bird whose shadow grants sovereignty to those it "touches"
ihām Deceit; ambiguity
iḥsān Beneficence
itihās Literally, "and so it was"; history; legend; the Hindu epics
izzat Self-respect; face; honor
Japjī Guru Nanak's hymn which begins the Adi Granth
Jāp Guru Gobind Singh's hymn which begins the Dasam Granth
Javāmi'ulḥikāyāt va Lavāmi'u'rrivāyāt *A Collection of Stories and Illuminations from History*
Joti Bigās *Divine Light's Progress*
kabitt Poem; a collection of poetry by Bhai Gurdas Bhalla
Kalilah va Dimnah Famous Arabic interpretation of the Sanskrit *Pañchatantra*
Karna Parab Karna chapter of the Mahabharata in Brajbhasha verse
kathā Exposition; homily
kathākar Story-teller; expositor of Sikh scriptures and history
kavi-prāśaṃsā Ode to poets
kīrtan Congregational singing
Khalsa Sikh martial order
Khālse dī vāsī Khalsa's dwelling; Anandpur
Khamsah Quintet; genre of Persian poetry made famous by Nizami
khaṇḍe kī pāhul Ritual of intiation into the Khalsa
khiṭāb-i zamīnbūs Praise of the ruler in Persian poetry
khūn-i seyāvash The blood of Seyavash; Kai Khusrau
khwājah Master; lord; man of some distinction
lāṭṭhān Memorial marker
māhātmyā A work celebrating a sacred place
maktab Islamic school
maktūbāt Collection of a Sufi Master's letters to disciples
malfūẓāt Table-talks, sayings attributed to a Sufi pir and collected by his/her disciples
manṣabdār Rank-holder of the Mughal empire
mardī Manliness
maṣnavī Very popular genre of relatively lengthy poem perfected by Ferdausi

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meṣraʿ Persian hemistich (two of which make a *bait*)
miḥrāb Niche in the mosque pointing out the direction of Mecca
mīrī-pīrī Sikh doctrine of secular and spiritual sovereignty
mīr-munsḥī Principal clerk
munsḥī (munśī) Clerk
muqallīdān Imitation
murāfaʿāt Expression of humility
muṣḥaf Codex
nāʾib sūbahdar Deputy Governor
nām The divine self-expression that permeates the universe
nām, dhān, iśnān Meditating upon the *nām*; giving charity; purity
namāz (Per.) Muslim prayer
naqqālī "Imitation"; storytelling; acting
nastaʿlīq The method of writing Persian script which is most common in South Asia
naʿt Eulogy of the Prophet Muhammad
pahāṛī "Hilly" region of the Punjab
paiġhambar Spiritual master; Prophet Muhammad
paimān-sḥikān Oath-breaker
Pakhyān Charitr *Tales of Character*; longest portion of the Dasam Granth
Pañchatantra *The Five Precepts*
pand Admonition
panth The collective Sikh community
parivār vicchoṛā Family Separation
phala-śruti "Fruits by hearing"; the benefits accrued from hearing a certain text
prakāś Sunlight; apparent; out in the open
qiṣṣah (kissa) "Narrative"; popular poem, usually follows folk themes
Raghuvaṃśa Lineage of Raghu from which Rama is descended
rahit-nāmā Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sikh codes of conduct
rāj Rule
rāj-nītī Political treatise
raṅg Color
razm Battle
rīti Common courtly style Brajbhasha compositions
Rostam-i Hind Rostam of India
ṣalāt (Ar.) Muslim prayer
sām, dām, bhed, and ***daṇḍ*** Spells, bribes, cunning, and threats
samūndarīk Palmistry
sanad Contract
sāqī Cup bearer
Sarab Loh Granth *Book of All Steel* attributed to Guru Gobind Singh
sardār Chieftain
Sḥāh-nāmah-khwān (Turkish: ***Şehnāme-ḫvān***) ***Sḥāh-nāmah*** reciter
sḥarīʿa Islamic law

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shikastah Short-hand
shitābī Haste
Sikhān dī Bhagatmālā (Bhagat Ratnāvālī) *The Rosary of Sikh Devotees; (The Jeweled Garland of Devotees)*
Sikhī Sikhism; Sikhness
Sikh Rahit Maryādā Modern Khalsa Sikh code of conduct
Silsilah Chain; tradition
simraṇ (nām simraṇ) Disciplined remembrance of the *nām*
Singh Sabha Nineteenth-century Sikh reform movement (est. 1873)
śabad Word; hymn; passage from the Ādi Granth; divine self expression
śleṣa "Embrace"; Sanskrit poetic term for ambiguity
ślok Hymn
Sorush Zoroastrian angel
śrinigar-ras Erotic sentiment
sūbahdār Governor
sukhan Promise; word
Sunahrā Makān Golden Building in Fatehpur Sikri
tāj-bakhsh Crown-bestower
takhalluṣ Sobriquet
tamar patar Inscribed copper plate
tanāsub Harmony of images
tatkarā Index folio
terā jor Through Your strength
ṭhāṭh "Tent"; "pavilion"
tisar panth Third panth
twai praśād Through Your grace
vaidya Physician
vakīl Messenger
vār Heroic ode
vīr ras Heroic sentiment
yādgāh Memory site
yādgār Memorial; invested with memory
zat Caste
zikr Sufi spiritual discipline of remembrance
Ẓafar-nāmah-'i Hamdallāh Mustaufi *Victory Book of Hamdallah Mustaufi*
Zindagī-nāmah *Book of Life*

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